

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died


TAPS®

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

SUMMER 2021 | MAGAZINE



WHAT'S INSIDE: WHAT IT MEANS TO HOLD SPACE FOR SOMEONE
MEN'S VIRTUAL CHAT ★ KNOWLEDGE. CONNECTION. HOPE.

A hand with a blue and black braided bracelet reaches up towards a bright sunrise. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a lens flare effect. In the background, a valley with white rock formations is visible, and numerous hot air balloons are floating in the sky. The overall scene is warm and inspiring.

THESE DAYS I ONLY
SURROUND MYSELF WITH
PEOPLE WHO FEEL
LIKE SUNLIGHT

~ RUDY FRANCISCO



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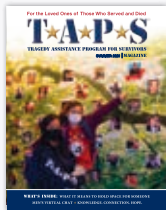
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and address changes to info@taps.org.

TAPS IS HERE

24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK
202.588.TAPS (8277)

- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Caregiver to Survivor Program
- ★ Casework Assistance
- ★ Connections to Community-Based Care
 - ★ Emergency Financial Assistance
 - ★ Education Resources and Support for Post-Secondary Education
- ★ TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®
 - ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Seminars, Retreats, One-Day Gatherings
 - ★ Sports & Entertainment Events
 - ★ Women's Empowerment Program
- ★ Good Grief Camp for Children/Teens
- ★ National Military Mentor Program
 - ★ Young Adult Program
 - ★ TAPS Online Community
 - ★ TAPS Magazine



ON THE COVER

Liv showing her Military Mentor the message she wrote to her dad on the Our Heroes Tree.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER JONES

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About TAPS

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is the leading national organization providing compassionate care and survivor support services for the families of America's fallen military heroes. Since 1994, TAPS has offered support to all those grieving the death of a military loved one through peer-based emotional support, connections with grief and trauma resources, grief seminars and retreats for adults, Good Grief Camps for children, casework assistance, connections to community based care, online and in-person support groups and the 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline, all at no cost to surviving families. For more information, please visit TAPS.org or call 202-588-TAPS (8277).

Connect with Us!

SHARE YOUR STORY

Your stories can bring hope and healing to TAPS families. We invite you to share a story about your loved one or your grief journey. All submissions will be considered for TAPS Magazine, our blogs at taps.org, and other TAPS publications. (Content may be edited and submission does not guarantee publication). We invite you to read our submission policy and submit your story at taps.org/shareyourstory.

JOIN OUR ONLINE COMMUNITY

Information on resources and programs are easily found at taps.org. You'll also find blogs, message boards and chats for connection to others. Learn more at taps.org/onlinecommunity.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Share your thoughts or TAPS experience with us at editor@taps.org. Also join us on social media:

facebook.com/tapsorg | twitter.com/tapsorg

linkedin.com/company/tragedy-assistance-program-for-survivors

youtube.com/c/tapsorg | instagram.com/tapsorg

YOU CAN TRUST TAPS

TAPS exceeds industry standards for financial accountability. We are proud to have received many of the top nonprofit charity ratings available.



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OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER



Dear TAPS Family,

TAPS is a family, and the TAPS magazine is our gift to you, our hug in the mail, where we hope you will hear your own voice in the words of other survivors and find guidance and support in the words of our professionals. Within the pages of this issue, you will read stories of the beauty of art, the gentle resonance of poetry, and the healing power of nature.

As you feel the warmth of summer and find opportunities to get outdoors, we want to remind you that TAPS is here for you with our virtual programs including Women's Empowerment; at our TAPS Togethers and Care Groups meeting in local communities; and at our Regional Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps coming up in Los Angeles, Jacksonville and Columbus.

Together, we've gathered safely at our 27th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, carried the stories of our loved ones across the miles with Carry The Load, and found new ways to reach out to each other as we emerge into our new normal. Please know that TAPS is here for you, forever and always, with comfort and resources – visit our website at taps.org, follow us on social media @TAPSOrg, or call our National Military Survivor Helpline at 202-588-TAPS(8277).

TAPS is a family made up of all of us who are walking this journey to remember and honor those we love. They are forever in our hearts, and their love lives on.

With Care,

Bonnie Carroll
TAPS Founder and President



DEAR TAPS...

GRATITUDE FOR OUR TAPS FAMILY

TAPS SURVIVOR CARE TEAM

"I know at any time I always have TAPS available if I need it. I may not need it but knowing it is available is a true comfort."



TAPS PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

"TAPS has been a part of our foundation that stabilizes our family. The consistency and reliability of resources available at TAPS continues to remind our family that we are part of a larger community of survivors and that we are seen, wanted, and valued."



TAPS 24/7 NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR HELPLINE

"Thank you once again for your kindness this morning. Just talking with you I felt encouraged and supported going forward in my journey."



TAPS RESOURCE KITS

"I didn't know where my thinking would be had it not been for the box you sent and the messages of encouragement I received."

SHARE YOUR TAPS EXPERIENCE AND GIVE HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS. EMAIL: EDITOR@TAPS.ORG

MEMORY BOXES: Grief As A Visual Poem

Susan K. Coti | Surviving Mother of Lance Cpl. Niall Coti-Sears, U.S. Marine Corps

When the knock on the door came, we were very far away. We were in Australia and the flight home was the longest journey of my life, not counting the miles. I just wanted to sleep and hopefully not wake up. My son, Lance Cpl. Niall W. Coti-Sears died on June 23, 2012, after being mortally wounded by an IED in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

For the first two months following his death, I dosed myself with wine and anti-anxiety medication to fall asleep. Eventually, I “woke up” and decided to make memory boxes, starring Niall, for myself, for family and for friends. This put me on the road towards healing. Infused with the spirit of Niall, these boxes would inspire a little joy. Just the idea of creating these memory boxes gave me some hope.

Making Memories Come Alive

I made the first memory box for Niall’s half-brother, Adrian. Inside, I placed a lock of Niall’s hair tied with a ribbon and one of his baby teeth. Adrian was a fascinated three-year-old when Niall was born and became a caring big brother. I also placed other artifacts in the box that represented Niall: a photo of a guitar, a tiny piano, an “Admit One” ticket, photos of Niall as a child and as a young man, and a Marine Corps symbol for Niall’s pride and love of the Corps.

The next boxes I made went to my parents and Niall’s former girlfriend and first love, Angie, and his step siblings. Afterwards, I started to make them for other parents who lost their children.

The first was for the family of Cpl. Nathan Brooks, a close friend and fellow Marine of Niall’s, who died by suicide in 2016. Nathan called to wish me a happy Mother’s Day six weeks before he died. I made two boxes for his family. I also made a box for the mother and sister of a former student of mine, Nicole, who died by suicide.

Making a memory box involves shaping a life into a small space by choosing items and pictures that show some of the special qualities of that person who is so very loved. It is not a complete picture, but rather a snapshot. It is a visual poem.

This artistic process gives me such a sense of liberation, as if I’m feeling my way out of darkness and infusing myself with light. It helps me to focus on the joy that person gave my life and can continue to give in the form of memories. I want the parents, siblings and other loved ones to feel a sense of happiness and joy, just as I do, when they see their own box; it is something that will temper the sadness.

Finding New Inspiration

I recently started making the memory boxes again after taking a break for about two years. I felt newly inspired by reading the 2020 summer issue of the TAPS Magazine. Every article just pumps me up! I’ve gained value from others who share their story and all the creative ways TAPS Families dedicate their time and energy to honoring their loved ones.

As I create more memory boxes, I wanted to share with all of you how making memory boxes of your own, starring your loved one, might offer healing in your own grief journey.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUSAN K. COTI

PUT ME IN COACH:

TAPS YOUNG ADULT COACHING SERIES

PILOT: JANUARY TO MARCH 2021

Renée Monczynski | Survivor Services Manager, Young Adult Program

The TAPS Young Adult Program has been part of the programs offered by TAPS for five years, welcoming and supporting survivors between the ages of 18 and 30. This program bridges the gap between Youth Programs and Adult Programs by concentrating on five pillars: Personal Development, Financial Stability, Career Guidance, Communications, and Service to Others.

We transition several times throughout our life: we move, change jobs, and add or lose relationships. Along the way, our peers, friends and families help us; and, our mentors guide us professionally and personally. Put Me in Coach helps our young adults prepare for these transitions by pairing them one on one with a volunteer military mentor. Together they navigate the 10 week lesson curriculum. This creates an environment where young adults feel seen and heard and are safe to explore. By the end of the virtual series, the participants will have gained skills within each pillar, including how to cultivate a mentor/mentee relationship that will serve them throughout their life.

**WITH THE SUCCESS OF
OUR PILOT SERIES, WE ARE
EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THAT
PUT ME IN COACH
WILL CONTINUE TO BE
OFFERED WITHIN THE TAPS
VIRTUAL EVENTS CALENDAR.**

**BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR
THE NEXT SESSION AT
[TAPS.ORG/EVENTS](https://taps.org/events)**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY
QUESTIONS ABOUT
THE SERIES OR OTHER
OPPORTUNITIES
AVAILABLE FOR
YOUNG ADULTS WITH TAPS,
PLEASE DIRECT THEM TO
YOUNGADULTS@TAPS.ORG**

TAPS YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPANTS WHO COMPLETED OUR PILOT SERIES SHARED:

"I learned so much from each week's sessions. It was more than the coursework, it was having a personal coach/mentor to help with life too."

"The coaching series was great. I didn't know I could learn so much from a virtual series, but I'm so glad I did it."

"I'm so excited to apply what I learned in a new budget, and in the way I apply myself at work."

"It gave me a lot of information and helped me prepare for the future, as well as deal with issues like procrastination."

**MONICA JAIKARAN, SURVIVING SPOUSE OF MASTER-AT-ARMS PETTY OFFICER
1ST CLASS DAMESHVAR JAIKARAN AND THE MOTHER OF A TAPS YOUNG
ADULT ALSO SHARED:**

"I am so impressed by the Put Me in Coach coaching series. My son, Dominic, is 18 years old and was matched with a wonderful coach, Nathaniel Lee, a TAPS Legacy Mentor. They instantly hit it off via telephone, text, FaceTime and Instagram. Our young adults have suffered so much loss during the past year due to COVID-19, so I was hesitant to enroll my son into the virtual program. But, Nathaniel made it work. I was so thrilled with the weekly topics, especially the mock interviews and resume help. This program helped keep my son accountable, engaged, happy and on task."

WHAT IT MEANS TO HOLD SPACE FOR SOMEONE

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT OF 'BEING THERE' FOR OTHERS

Heather Plett | *Editor's note: Originally Published via heatherplett.com on March 15, 2015*



PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES

When my Mom was dying, my siblings and I gathered to be with her in her final days. None of us knew anything about supporting someone in their transition out of this life into the next, but we were pretty sure we wanted to keep her at home. So we did.

While we supported Mom, we were in turn supported by a gifted palliative care nurse, Ann, who came every few days to care for Mom and to talk to us about what we could expect in the coming days.

Ann gave us an incredible gift in those final days. Though it was an excruciating week, we knew we were being held by someone only a phone call away.

In the two years since then, I've often thought about Ann and the important role she played. By offering gentle, nonjudgmental support and guidance, she helped us walk one of the most difficult journeys of our lives.

She was *holding space* for us.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'HOLD SPACE' FOR SOMEONE ELSE?

It means we are willing to walk alongside another person in whatever journey they're on without judging them, making them feel inadequate, trying to fix them, or trying to impact the outcome. When we hold space for others we open our hearts, offer unconditional support, and let go of judgment and control. We have to be prepared to step to the side so they can make their own choices, giving gentle guidance when it's needed and making them feel safe. Sometimes we find ourselves holding space for people while they hold space for others. In our situation, Ann was holding space for us while we held space for Mom.

In my own roles as facilitator, teacher and mother, I do my best to hold space for other people in the same way Ann did for me and my siblings. It's not always easy because I have a human tendency to want to fix people or give them advice, but I keep trying because I know it's important. At the same time, there are people in my life I trust to hold space for me.

WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT HOLDING SPACE FOR OTHERS

Here are the lessons I've learned from Ann and others who have held space for me:

- Give people permission to trust their own intuition and wisdom.

When we were supporting Mom, we had no experience to rely on and yet, intuitively, we knew what was needed. We knew how to sit and sing hymns to her and we knew how to love her. In a very gentle way, Ann let us know we didn't need to do things according to some arbitrary health care protocol — we simply needed to trust our intuition and wisdom from the many years we'd loved Mom.

- Give people only as much information as they can handle.

Ann gave us some simple instructions and left us with a few handouts, but did not overwhelm us with far more than we could process in our tender time of grief.

- Don't take their power away — empower them instead.

At times, we may need to step in and make hard decisions for others when they are incapable. But in almost every other case, adults and children need the autonomy to make their own choices. Ann knew we needed to feel empowered in making decisions on our Mom's behalf, so she offered support but never tried to direct or control us.

- Try to keep your own ego out of it.

We all get caught in the trap of our own ego now and then — when we believe someone else's success is dependent on our intervention, or when we're convinced whatever emotions they choose to unload on us are about us instead of them. It's a trap I've occasionally found myself slipping into when I teach. I become more concerned about my own success than the success of my students. But that doesn't serve anyone — not even me. To truly support my students I need to keep my ego out of it and create a space where they have the opportunity to grow and learn.

- Give guidance and help with humility and thoughtfulness.

A wise space holder knows to withhold guidance when it makes a person feel badly and to offer it gently when a person asks for it or is too lost to know what to ask for. Though Ann did not take our power or autonomy away, she did offer to come and give Mom baths and do some of the more challenging parts of caregiving. Gentle offers are what we all must give when we hold space for others.

- Create a container for complex emotions, fear, trauma, etc.

When people feel they are held, they feel safe enough to allow complex emotions to surface that might normally remain hidden. Someone who is practiced at holding space knows this can happen and will be prepared to hold it in a supportive and nonjudgmental way.

- Allow them to make different decisions and to have different experiences than you would.

When we hold space we release control and honor and respect differences; recognizing those differences may lead others to make choices we might not make.

Holding space is not something we can master overnight or adequately address in a list of tips like the ones I've just offered. It's complex and evolves through practice; it is unique to each person and each situation. But always, it is a practice of love, liberation and leadership.

Heather is the author of the book, "The Art of Holding Space: A Practice of Love, Liberation and Leadership." She is also a facilitator, teacher and co-founder of the Centre for Holding Space. She has used her personal experiences to create workshops on the topic of 'holding space' and has created a certified practitioner program rooted in the subject. You can learn more about Heather at heatherplett.com.

Working Together in Treating Suicide Loss Trauma

TAPS AND HOME BASE

Jennifer Keeling | Senior Coordinator, Suicide Pre/Postvention



Survivors dealing with grief may also be coping with trauma, so it helps to understand how this impacts healing.

Trauma can be experienced from many life events like accidents, crime, disasters, war, medical emergencies, or violence. Trauma can produce emotional and physical responses as a result of exposure to extreme, unexpected, or horrifying circumstances. The degree to which any given person will react to these incidents is as unique as the person or situation.

This is why the TAPS Suicide Prevention & Postvention team developed the TAPS Suicide Postvention Model — a comprehensive framework for healing and growth. This three-phase approach to postvention care offers a pathway to survivors in navigating the aftereffects of a traumatic event, specifically suicide loss.

The three phases are Stabilization, Grief Work, and Posttraumatic growth. (To learn more about the model, please visit taps.org/suicide).

The loss of a loved one to suicide can be a highly traumatizing event, especially for those who witness the death or discover their loved ones. When left unaddressed, trauma can be a major obstacle that keeps people feeling stuck in the chaos and confusion of trying to piece one's life back together. This can often interfere with the ability to grieve the loss, move toward grief work and eventually achieve posttraumatic growth. Therefore, it's important to address the symptoms of trauma as soon as possible.

Recognizing the need for a program specific to treating survivors' trauma, TAPS partnered with Boston's Home Base

program in 2017 to offer treatment to survivors of suicide loss. Home Base is a Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital program dedicated to healing “invisible wounds” that afflict veterans, service members, and their families through world-class, life-saving clinical care. Home Base describes the program as “a two-week outpatient program that treats co-occurring PTSD, Prolonged Grief Disorder, and depression. It is a service of the Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital. The two-week Intensive Clinical Program for Families of the Fallen (ICPFF) provides 63 hours of treatment and starts these survivor family members on a path of recovery from their grief and re-connection to themselves and to hope.”

Together, Home Base and TAPS created a program to offer specialized trauma treatment combined with peer-based support to those grieving the loss of a military loved one to suicide.

Participants go through the ICP with a small cohort of peers, usually between 10 and 12 fellow suicide loss survivors, and engage in activities like individual and group therapy; stress reduction and resiliency; fitness and nutrition; integrative therapy such as yoga, art, tai chi, and equine therapy; and evening and weekend activities to help deepen peer connections and bonds. Thanks to Home Base and generous funding from Wounded Warrior Project, the two-week program is offered free of charge to TAPS suicide loss survivors and includes travel,

lodging, meals, and program treatment fees. To date, nine cohorts have completed the program — seven cohorts of spouses and intimate partners, and two cohorts of parents.

For TAPS, this partnership has been a game-changer since it has provided the missing link to trauma treatment, allowing us to provide life-changing trauma therapy for survivors. Survivors who graduated from Home Base have shared some of the following feedback:

“Thank you so much for everything and for not giving up on me. I feel like everything just got clear for me. One thousand pounds lifted off of my chest. I am so grateful and can now have the ‘normal’ family that I had always wanted. I just had to get out of my own way. I am so much at peace and will use my tools.”

“Home Base taught me that I was not to blame for my husband’s death. I died when he died five years ago, and I stopped feeling anything. When I returned home from Boston and hugged my grandkids, I felt it. For the first time in five years, I FELT it!”

“The last two weeks were some of the most difficult days, ripping off all of the band aids to every emotion I pushed far away in order to survive. I am forever grateful to Home Base and to TAPS for the life-changing opportunity. I know there will be good days and bad days. I know that it’s okay. I know I am NOT broken. I am relieved to know I am not alone...to have found a group of amazing (former) spouses who have lived similar experiences.”

Most ICP participants complete the program feeling as though they have finally broken through the roadblocks of trauma. By stabilizing their grief, working on themselves and their grief, and focusing on what might come next in their lives, they can begin to experience forward momentum toward posttraumatic growth. This process requires strength, courage, and an enormous amount of hard work, but it is the key to finding a “grief rhythm” that promotes healing and growth after loss.



JENNIFER KEELING AND EQUINE FRIEND



HOME BASE, TAPS, AND FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN CHALLENGE COINS.

If you or a family member were present at the time or witnessed the suicide, discovered your loved one, or had been exposed to other traumatic incidents prior to the death, such as previous suicide attempts, threats of self-harm or harm to others, and/or domestic or intimate partner violence, you may be a candidate for the Home Base Program. To learn more about the Intensive Clinical Program for Families of the Fallen provided by Home Base Programs, please email us at suicidepostvention@taps.org or call 202-588-8277 (TAPS). For those in need of support who may not need such an intensive treatment program, TAPS has a Community Care team to offer referrals to trauma-informed therapists. Please call 202-588-8277 (TAPS) and we will be able to assist you in that referral.

We Are Here for You!

TAPS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR HELPLINE

Grief knows no boundaries. Moments when we need extra support can come at any time. Our Helpline is answered live — 24/7/365 — with gentle care from peer professionals who ensure the caller has open access to all that TAPS provides. Whether you need emotional support, connection to resources and information or if you want to share what is on your heart, the TAPS Helpline is here for you. Call 202-588-TAPS (8277).

PEER-BASED SUPPORT

This is the foundation of TAPS. Survivors helping survivors — coming together to find strength and hope. Our Peer Mentor network offers a supportive companion as you navigate the aftermath of loss. Survivors who are at least 18 months out from their loss volunteer their time and receive training to be a supportive presence for new survivors. You will gain comfort in knowing you are not alone. Peer Mentors also lend support at TAPS events throughout the year. Find out more: taps.org/peermentors

CASEWORK ASSISTANCE

Managing paperwork and unexpected needs can add to the weight of grief and loss. Our casework team delivers compassionate assistance for all the needs a family may have, including access to pro bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, information on state and federal benefits, and connections to private social services support. Find out more: taps.org/casework

EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES

TAPS guides survivors through the bureaucracy and paperwork necessary to receive the education benefits available for the dependents of America's fallen heroes. Coordinators work with you to determine the best options for financial assistance. Find out more: taps.org/edu

COMMUNITY-BASED GRIEF SUPPORT

TAPS provides connection to free and unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources and local support groups. We can assist in finding the right grief counselor to help you develop coping skills, work through questions and navigate the myriad of emotions associated with grief and loss. Careful research and a large network of strong community partners help locate support close to home. Find out more: taps.org/griefcounseling

SURVIVOR CARE TEAM

A pillar of TAPS support is our Survivor Care Team. This team of peer grief professionals are all military loss survivors, just like you. Armed with firsthand experience, your care team member will help you connect with the resources and support you need. They will help you discover hope and find resilience as you navigate the grief journey. Find out more: taps.org/survivorcareteam

SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT

A death by suicide can leave behind a wake of emotions that complicate an already painful grieving process. Many of us ask, “Why did this happen?” We worry that our loved ones will be remembered for how they died instead of how they lived and served. Suicide loss survivors can be assured they have a safe space within TAPS to remember, honor and grieve their loved one. Special programming and resources, including the annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, provide gentle, understanding support as we work through the emotions associated with this type of loss. As peers, we want you to know that you can and will survive this. You are not alone and we will be by your side, offering comfort, care and hope. Find out more: taps.org/suicideloss

ILLNESS LOSS SUPPORT

TAPS is leading the effort to ensure families whose loved one died from illness are recognized, cared for and aware of all benefits they are eligible to receive. TAPS is working to raise awareness about risks and effects of toxic exposure and help families navigate the benefits process after loss. We are pulling together relevant legislation, medical studies, expert testimony, literature, and reports to create a reference manual to serve as a foundation for future advocacy. Find out more: Email illnessloss@taps.org

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The pain of loss ushers in hard questions: Why are we here? What is our purpose? Our Women's Empowerment programming helps incorporate concepts of identity and spirituality into transformative goal-setting. You'll be provided with tools to help you move confidently into the life you've imagined. Find out more: taps.org/empowerment

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Though their lives are marked by grief, young survivors at TAPS know their lives will also be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health and education, TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing, including Good Grief Camps, summer campouts, teen adventures and family retreats.

YOUNG ADULT PROGRAMS

This dynamic program is for surviving children and siblings ages 18-25 and helps our graduating Good Grief Camp children transition into a program all their own. The Young Adult Program focuses on five pillars of growth: Personal Development, Financial Stability, Communication, Career Development and Service to Others. Each individual is given tools to create a well-rounded life full of hope, healing, and growth. Find out more: youngadults@taps.org

TAPS INSTITUTE FOR HOPE AND HEALING®

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center. Through webinars, webcasts, workshops and events, the Institute educates survivors of loss as well as professionals who work in the area of death notification, funerals and grief and bereavement support. For military loss survivors and other survivors, the Institute provides programs such as understanding suicide; understanding children's grief; practical tips for coping with grief; wellness workshops and creative ways to keep the memories of loved ones alive. For professionals, the Institute offers academic programming taught by experts in the field. For these professionally oriented programs, continuing education credits are available from a wide range of health and social service professional boards. Find out more: taps.org/institute

PUBLICATIONS

TAPS has created several proprietary publications to serve the survivor community and offer valuable inspiration and information. A series of pocket-size guides, with input by subject matter experts, offer insight and information on available resources and services. These guides are provided at no cost to survivors. Other publications include the book, “Healing Your Grieving Heart after a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends” by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., the children's book “Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope” and the “TAPS Magazine”. Find out more: taps.org/publications

Why Do Some Never Say Goodbye?

Perry Monroe | Surviving father of Sgt. Christopher Monroe, U.S. Army

I have always wondered why some people never say goodbye,
as if they knew that they were never coming back.

Not saying goodbye raises more questions than answers:

Did they know something I didn't know?

Did they know, when they didn't say goodbye, that would be it?

My son, I would like to have said goodbye to you.

Goodbye would have closed the chapter when we last parted company.

Maybe you knew this was the end, and you wanted to leave without saying a word,
hoping your silence could stop me from knowing.

Or, maybe, you thought we would see each other again.

The latter is what I like to think . . .

I thought you would still be here, even now.

We planned on so many father-son memories that we were going to make.

When you didn't say goodbye, it left a hole in my heart impossible to fill.

My life has changed in ways I never wanted.

But, the biggest change is that I have met others who, like me, never got to say goodbye to their loved ones.

We have exchanged our lost goodbyes for hellos as we come together in our grief.

We say hello as our way of dealing with never saying goodbye.

Your TAPS Family is always here for you, whether this is your first hello, or if you have attended many events. You can connect with your TAPS Family in so many ways, both virtually and in person.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR EVENTS, CARE GROUPS AND ONLINE CHATS AT: [TAPS.ORG/EVENTS](https://taps.org/events)

JOIN YOUR TAPS FAMILY

» FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [TAPS.ORG/EVENTS](https://taps.org/events)

TAPS Seminars and Good Grief Camps offer the chance to remember and honor those we love in a relaxed and welcoming setting.

Together, we safely gather to share our stories among others who understand military loss, no matter the circumstance of death and no matter where you are on your grief journey. Our peers offer comfort and support, and our workshops offer information and inspiration to guide you along the way.

Our seminars are held both in-person and virtually, so you can choose how you would like to participate or attend. Review our seminar calendar and find a TAPS Seminar near you, or visit our events page to connect with peers through a variety of other programs offered for survivors.

SEMINARS & GOOD GRIEF CAMPS

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

JULY 23-25

WESTERN REGIONAL
SEMINAR AND
GOOD GRIEF CAMP

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

AUGUST 13-15

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL
MILITARY SEMINAR
AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP

COLUMBUS, OHIO

SEPTEMBER 24-26

MIDWEST REGIONAL
SEMINAR AND
GOOD GRIEF CAMP

DALLAS, TEXAS

OCTOBER 8-11

NATIONAL MILITARY
SUICIDE SURVIVOR
SEMINAR AND
GOOD GRIEF CAMP



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOE TORMA

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Every Detail Remembered™

Dignity®
MEMORIAL

The personal sacrifices made by members of the armed forces and their families cannot be taken for granted. We deeply appreciate those who have served our country with courage and selflessness, and Dignity Memorial® providers are honored to do our part in turn by caring for our military service members, veterans and their families.

We are a team of dedicated, local funeral service professionals deeply rooted in our communities and committed to providing hope and healing during difficult times. That is why we are proud to announce our partnership with TAPS as a continuation of our promise to honor those who serve and comfort those who grieve.



“Dignity Memorial remains committed to supporting veterans who have helped to protect our freedom and have sacrificed so much for our country,” said Chief Operating Officer Jay Waring. “As a TAPS partner, we will continue to uphold our promise to honor all military service members and their families with the

upmost dignity and compassion. Through this partnership, we hope to expand our opportunity to give back and work together to help survivors of military and veteran loss through their grief journey.”

Dignity Memorial will assist in enhancing the outreach and engagement of Survivor Services to newly bereaved military survivors by providing grief support materials connecting families with the TAPS Survivor Care Team. As partners in grief, our mission is the same – to provide comfort and compassion in the communities we serve. In addition to providing grief support, our associates are eager to participate in the many volunteer opportunities TAPS offers at survivor seminars, including military mentors for TAPS children and teenagers.

We may never know the sacrifices that were made by our nation’s veterans but it is our privilege to serve them and their families. Our partnership with TAPS is a vital initiative to give our service members and their loved ones the support they so deserve. It is with great pleasure and pride that we work with TAPS to honor our nation’s heroes who sacrifice so much to protect our freedom.

Dignity Memorial® supports the veteran community in a number of ways: through the Dignity Memorial® Homeless Veterans Burial Program which offers dignified funeral services with military honors at no cost to homeless or indigent veterans in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; The We Honor Veterans program where we strive to meet the unique needs of veterans and their families in collaboration with local hospice organizations; and through our Veterans Associate Resource Community, an associate-led group dedicated to veteran wellness, leadership and advancement.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCI/DIGNITY MEMORIAL

MEN'S VIRTUAL CHAT

Healing Alongside Other Surviving Fathers

Timothy P. Jabin | Surviving Father of Airman Apprentice Tyrone Anthony Jabin, U.S. Navy

My son, Tyrone Anthony, died by suicide on July 10, 2020. The last time that I spoke to my son was on July 4, his 25th birthday. After Ty's death, I was contacted by Don Lipstein with the TAPS Survivor Care Team. Don invited me to participate in the Men's Virtual Chat. Two Wednesdays a month a group of about 20 to 30 surviving men gather in this virtual chat to honor our loved one, who is typically, but not always, a son. Sadly, there are always new faces. During one of our meetings I typed a message into the chat: "sympathy is great; empathy is a blessing."

THE BLESSING OF EMPATHY

The TAPS Virtual Men's Chat is a safe, welcoming space. We are men of different ages, different life experiences, different socio-economic backgrounds, and different faith experiences. The common thread is that each of our loved ones died while serving their country. There is certainly sympathy for each other and the loss we have suffered. But more importantly, there is empathy.

These men are not only walking the same path that I am walking, but they are walking in my shoes. They have received that quiet, early morning knock on the door by two uniformed men; they have fallen to the floor in disbelief; they have received an Honor Flag and heard Taps played; they have sorted through their son's gear; they have celebrated birthdays and sacred holidays with an empty chair. No matter how long each of us has been grieving, we honor and remember a son that we will never again hold in our arms.



AIRMAN APPRENTICE TYRONE ANTHONY JABIN

The men's virtual chat is a safe place for you to connect with others who understand loss and grief. Share stories of your loved one or simply listen and find healing from other men who have experienced the loss of a loved one who has served in the military. Register with the TAPS Online Community to stay connected with your TAPS Family through these and other scheduled video and text chats, blogs, and peer group support at online.taps.org.

OUR LOVED ONES GATHER TOO

Not too long ago, I shared with Don a vision I had after attending the funeral of another of our nation's fallen warriors. I envision that when we dads gather on Wednesday evenings, our sons gather too. They are a rowdy bunch! Whether the most senior of the bunch gives the others the high sign or they just sense that we are gathering, they settle down and gather

around an eternal campfire. As we dads meet, I envision each of our sons extending their hand and resting it on our shoulders. They are present with us. And when we conclude our meeting, they are right back to their rowdy heavenly behavior!

None of us want to belong to this club. But, we have each other in the TAPS Virtual Men's Chat and that has made all the difference.

#HONORTHEM | #MORETHANMEMORIALDAY

The 27th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Memorial Day is more than just a day for TAPS families. We are connected by a common thread, and we are part of a larger American legacy of grief and loss. Our 27th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp provided a warm, comforting and supportive atmosphere as we connected as a TAPS Family to honor the holiday as a day of reverence and remembrance. Survivors safely gathered together in-person in our nation's capital and connected virtually from across the country. It was a weekend spent forging friendships, finding hope, sharing memories of our loved ones and how we #HonorThem. We are TAPS. We are Family. Love Lives On.



“Overshadow grief with the power of positive healing.”



Clockwise from top left: Good Grief Camp mentors, Group Leaders and surviving children gather at the GGC opening ceremony excited for a weekend with TAPS Family; Group Leader hugs a child, as child and family land at Dulles International Airport with Wheels UP; SEAC Ramón Colón-López speaks with a survivor at the seminar opening ceremony; First time TAPS attendees prepare for a weekend of hope and healing after the opening ceremony; Gracious volunteers dedicate their time to our TAPS families helping wherever needed; Bob Delany speaks to TAPS Good Grief Camp Military and Legacy Mentors, Senior Mentors, and Group Leaders.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NESSA CHASE, STEPHEN GALVAN, JENNIFER IONES, BRANDY MEJIA, AND ARI STRAUSS

GOOD GRIEF CAMP



“From listening to our stories, to sharing kind words, even dancing with our Good Grief Campers.”



Clockwise from top left: A supportive furry friend gives a hug to a survivor outside of the Our Heroes picture tree; General Mark Milley greets two GGC children after speaking to our TAPS families at Saturday's banquet dinner; A child holds hands with her mentor while dancing during the GGC opening ceremony; A child is filled with wonder while TAPS Childcare blows bubbles; Brett Jones, Founder of Gold Star Mentors teaches the 2021 GGC graduating class how to play a song on gifted guitars; A group of teen friends and mentor skip arm in arm during the GGC carnival; A child proudly holds a makeshift flag during the GGC opening ceremony which represents the blue Military Mentor shirt, red GGC shirt, and white Senior Mentor/Group Leader shirts.



“Eagerness to connect and relate to one another was downright remarkable.”



HEALING



Clockwise from top left: Senior Mentor and Group Leader welcome our children to GGC for the weekend; A child soars with happiness at the GGC carnival, landing in a pile of Military Mascots; A mentor and his mentee smile with joy during GGC; A Legacy Mentor break dances during the GGC carnival while other mentors and mentees cheer him on; A TAPS GGC graduate celebrates the milestone with his mom and looks ahead to Young Adult programming; A staff member and survivor share a warm hug during the seminar opening ceremony; Two TAPS adults provide peer support for each other; A surviving father proudly points to his son’s picture on the Our Heroes tree. Bottom of page: A group of survivors gather to participate in Bonnie Carroll’s God winks workshop.

SPECIAL EVENTS



“Healing is possible and courage lies within us all.”



Clockwise from top left: Bonnie Carroll and General Daniel Hokanson sign an agreement; TAPS International and Communications staff embrace a survivor during the opening ceremony; Voices of Service share the healing power of music with our TAPS families during the banquet dinner; The Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon gives a special performance during the banquet dinner; Our friend Robert Fogarty invites TAPS to participate in his vision with Dear World, after the presentation a survivor proudly writes on her arm “IS A WARRIOR”; A surviving child and his grandmother sit at their loved ones graveside at Arlington Cemetery; A Marine supports a surviving mother during the Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington Cemetery outside the Tomb of The Unknowns; TAPS mentors and two surviving children present their handmade wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns; Chef Robert Irvine and Bonnie Carroll on board the TAPS float at the National Memorial Day Parade.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

“HOW DO I MAKE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS WITH MY KIDS?”

This is a common question many of us have as guardians, particularly when we, and our kids, are grieving. Life is different for everyone in the family after someone dies and many of us struggle with how to engage and connect with our kids during times of grief. Here are a few thoughts about making meaningful connections with your children even in the midst of difficult times.

KNOWLEDGE: Kids do not come with instruction manuals, but there are ways we can get to know them better. Take a few minutes and consider: How does your child feel most comfortable being in the world? What do they like to do for fun? Are they quiet and reserved, or outgoing and boisterous? Knowing your child's preferences will help you to better understand them and ways to best engage with them.

NURTURE: Children fare better when they have loving adults in their lives who acknowledge them and show them they care. This can be quite challenging when we are grieving ourselves. We may not have the energy we once did to give the attention for which our children are longing. Nurture is the art of “seeing” kids and acknowledging we are glad they are in our lives. Here are a few examples of ways we might nurture children:

- 🕒 Validate Your Child's Feelings
- 🕒 Keep Your Voice Level Down
- 🕒 Build Trust and Promote Mutual Respect
- 🕒 Show Them How to Solve Their Problems
- 🕒 Encourage Your Child's Talents and Celebrate Their Successes
- 🕒 Love Them Unconditionally and Make Room for Imperfection

ENGAGEMENT: Having conversations with our children is important. However, there are many ways we can engage with them other than conversation. A child's language is play. They love it when we are present in the moment; let them take the lead when you are playing with them. As they see that you are interested in being part of the activity, they will trust you more and let you into their world.

We can also engage with them by establishing daily predictable routines. For example, we might share a family meal several nights a week, spend time visiting special places, or watch favorite television shows and movies.

Storytelling is another way we can engage with and make meaningful connections with children. Kids love to hear stories about us when we were their age or about themselves when they were younger.

TEEN CORNER

Connecting and communicating with teenagers can be challenging. As guardians, we want to know they are okay and that their grief is not overwhelming them. Many times we find ourselves throwing out questions like, “How are you?” or “How was your day?” only to get a shoulder shrug and a short response of “fine” or “okay.” Here are a few alternate approaches to connecting with teenagers and learning a little more about their world and how they are doing.

SHARING FAVORITE SONGS: Have them choose music to play around the house. Connect with them through songs you both like and have in common, or songs that remind you of your person who died.

COOKING MEALS TOGETHER: Ask them to join you in cooking a favorite meal of theirs, or their loved one's favorite meal. Let them take the lead and be there to assist them with the preparation.

TECHNOLOGY: Have them teach you about some of the technology they use or their favorite video games. When you ask them to teach you, you change the dynamics of your interactions and make lasting connections.

READ THE SAME BOOK SERIES: Many teens enjoy reading teen or young adult book series. Read the same series they are and discuss the storyline and characters together. Ask them about their favorite parts of the story or quotes they enjoy.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

MATERIALS: The unfinished statements as listed below, a pen, pencil, crayon, or markers.

WHY: This activity provides an opportunity for families to get to know one another better.

HOW TO USE: Give each family member 5 to 10 minutes to complete the statements below, then share your completed statements with one another. You may also exchange your completed statements and read each others' statements out loud to the rest of the group.

IF YOU REALLY KNEW ME...

1. I am proud of _____

2. The hardest thing I have ever done is _____

3. My relationship with my family is _____

4. What I find most difficult about each day is _____

5. What I love most about my family is _____

6. My biggest dream is _____

7. The person I feel closest to is _____

8. The funniest thing I can remember happening is _____

9. The way most people see me or label me is _____

10. I am talented at _____



THINGS THAT REMIND ME...

MATERIALS: Medium size cardboard box, gift wrapping paper, plain white paper torn into small postcard sized pieces, pen, pencil, crayons, or markers, and items each family member will find around the house.

WHY: Objects are all around us that are reminders of our person who died. We might often think of our person when we see these objects, but not openly share this with our family members. This activity provides the opportunity for families to learn more about each other and what things remind each family member about their loved one.

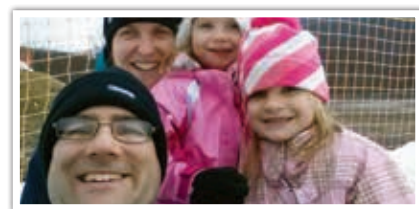
HOW TO USE: Wrap the cardboard box in gift wrapping paper. Select your favorite colors as a family or the favorite color(s) of your loved one. After decorating the box, place it somewhere central in your home. Instruct everyone to take 15 minutes exploring the house, yard, and/or thinking about things that remind you of your person who died.

Have each individual collect the items and put them in the box. Any items which are too big for the box or aren't readily available can be written down on a separate piece of paper. Fold each note and place it in the box. Once everyone has contributed something, take turns reaching in the box and pulling out items. The person who placed that particular item in the box should share first about why it was chosen. Allow others to share what that item means to them as well.

KNOWLEDGE. CONNECTION. HOPE.

THE JOURNEY OF A SURVIVING SPOUSE AND HER DAUGHTERS THROUGH ILLNESS LOSS

Robyn Thomson | Surviving Spouse of Lt. Col. Todd Thomson, U.S Army



TODD AND ROBYN THOMSON
WITH THEIR DAUGHTERS

Lt. Col. Todd Thomson proudly served his country for 20 and a half years. The love he had for being a soldier made him get up in the morning; it made his wheels turn. As a logistics officer, he spent time on various posts in the U.S., South Korea, and Iraq. He served for 18 months at Fort Dix, New Jersey, in 2003 and at Camp Victory in Baghdad, Iraq, from 2007 to 2008.

Throughout his military career he was a completely healthy man with no history of disease, in good physical condition and tobacco never touched his lips. But that changed in late August 2012, when he had to report for duty for two weeks in Florida to provide logistical operations for one of the national conventions. When he returned home two weeks later, in early September, he told me, “My stomach hurts, right around my navel.”

My healthy, strong, active husband became seriously ill in a short period of time. He lost 30 pounds in a matter of three to four weeks, was in the emergency department three times and cried due to the pain in his abdomen. On October 16, 2012, he was finally admitted into the hospital where, after an emergency surgery, it was discovered he had stage 3C colon cancer.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBYN THOMSON AND CHELSEA BISHOP

LEARNING OF TOXIC EXPOSURE

My career as a speech-language pathologist was to rehab people who were receiving or had completed chemotherapy, radiation, and biologic treatments for digestive cancers. When I learned about my husband's diagnosis, I immediately recognized that the cancer metastasized in the incorrect pattern for colon cancer. Typically, colon cancer metastasis goes to the lungs or liver, which have better outcomes. Instead, and in accordance with the rare pattern, it spread to his peritoneum, which is the serous lining of all the organs of the abdomen.

This led my family to ask deeper questions and seek more testing. The results of the genetic testing of the cancer indicated it was one of the rarest forms of colon cancer that is diagnosed in our country. We met with the leading colon cancer specialist in the country, at Johns Hopkins University, who wrote that the type of cancer Todd had was not a familiar mutation, but one from exposure to toxic materials.

The specialist also indicated that cancer from toxic exposure takes approximately five to ten years to become an emergent situation, as Todd experienced. Since there was no research on this type of cancer at the time of Todd's diagnosis, there were no drugs to specifically treat, destroy and eliminate the cancer he had. Consequently, he was administered traditional colon cancer chemotherapy and biologic therapy. It was a long and painful two and a half years for Todd. Todd suffered, and myself, our daughters and his family could only helplessly watch him.



LT. COL. TODD THOMSON

"I owe it to my daughters, and our country owes it to my daughters, to make sure their father is recognized as the courageous man who proudly served, suffered and died for his country from toxic exposure."

RECOGNIZING OUR COURAGEOUS HERO

On March 13, 2015, Todd passed away and was no longer in pain. Our daughters were six and three years old when he died. Our youngest was a baby when he was diagnosed, so she has no memories of her father being healthy. My oldest daughter suffers emotionally because she watched her father's 6-foot-7 body wither down to nothing. The hardest moment of my life was not hearing the diagnosis of Todd's cancer, or even holding him as he let out his last breath; but rather, coming home to tell my daughters that their dad died and watching part of their childhood innocence and joy leave them. I owe it to my daughters, and our country owes it to my daughters, to make sure their father is recognized as the courageous man who proudly served, suffered and died for his country from toxic exposure.

CONNECTING THROUGH TAPS

My daughters and I thought we would be lost after Todd's death. And we would have been lost without TAPS, that is for certain. TAPS has helped connect us to others whose military loved ones died due to cancer or illness.

I have learned that our stories are so incredibly similar; from how we managed the illness, to the feelings we encounter on our grief journeys. These connections validate my own story; they remind me that I am not alone in my experiences and emotions. Meeting others through TAPS whose military loved ones died due to an illness has taught me that our grief is processed in different ways, not better or worse, just – different.

As a nation, we are only beginning to understand military death due to toxic exposure and how to best help families, like mine, process this specific kind of grief. With the support, guidance, and expertise of TAPS, we are heading toward immense discovery to help illness loss survivors heal from the most traumatic events in our lives. All this is possible through the kindness, compassion, and ingenuity of TAPS, for which my daughters and I are forever grateful.



ROBYN AND HER DAUGHTERS AT THE 2019 TAPS HONOR GUARD GALA

Together with other partners in the military and veteran community, TAPS is working to advocate for veterans exposed to toxins, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Through these partnerships, we have made great strides over the past three years to create a growing awareness of the issue of toxic exposure by enlisting support from other organizations, such as the members of The Military Coalition (TMC).

According to Bonnie Carroll, TAPS Founder and President, "our partnership with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation (EDF) and the American Red Cross Military and Veteran Caregiver Network (MVCN)... will ensure a seamless transition and delivery of services to our nation's military and veteran caregivers and survivors."

Death by illness is one of the leading causes of death reported by military survivors who come to TAPS. Since 2008, TAPS has been supporting 14,207 survivors whose military loved ones died due to an illness. While we know there's a significant number of veterans who die of common illnesses, we have become deeply concerned that, like the Vietnam era, post 9/11 veterans have been exposed to toxins that are known to cause terminal illnesses. TAPS is working to gather survivor stories and aggregate data to better understand the scope and types of illness loss.

** If you are an illness loss survivor and would like to share your story of your military loved one, we invite you to email us at editor@taps.org. Further support for those grieving the death of a military loved one due to illness can also be found at taps.org/caregiver.*

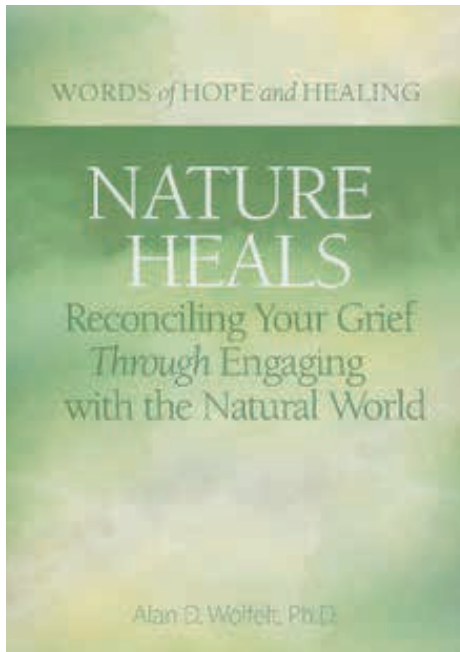
Love is natural. Grief is natural. Like the natural world around us, they are both wild, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and awe-inspiring things. Mourning, too, is all of these things. It's also healing. Over time and through ongoing expression, grief befriended and communicated is grief healed.
~ Dr. Alan Wolfelt

Nature Heals is a validation of what I believe and what all of us innately know to be true about life and about grief. I belong in nature's healing spaces. For it is in the outdoors I find myself woven into the fabric of the universe. I am my whole self when I am in nature. And because I am wholly present in nature my grief can exist too; it can be expressed, it can teach and it can evolve along with me.

Written by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a member of the TAPS Advisory Board and Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition, this easy-to-read book is packed with practical tools to navigate grief "the natural way."

NATURE HEALS

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. | Reviewed by Rachel Hunsell, Program Manager of TAPS Outdoor Engagement



INVITATION TO MOURN

Nature is not an almighty cure to our grief, but rather an invitation to mourn and move through our grief in ways natural to the human experience.

Grief is a “natural internal experience [including our thoughts and emotions] that follows the separation of anyone or anything we are attached to,” and our need for mourning is an “outward expression of our internal grief.” From this understanding, Dr. Wolfelt opens us up to the healing possibilities of intentional mourning through time spent with the natural world.

RECONNECTING WITH THE NATURAL WORLD

“Are you nature-deprived?” Dr. Wolfelt asks. For most of us the answer is yes at one time or another. This disconnection with nature plus grief has many of us feeling anxious, depressed and struggling to concentrate. Growing research shows we are innately connected to nature and our brains return to a more relaxed and focused state when we spend more time outdoors. We ruminate less and learn to practice mindfulness simply by being in nature.

Nature’s gift of awe can have profound effects. It allows us to feel connected to something bigger than ourselves and opens the door to explore our values and beliefs. We are yearning for hope and nature answers in healing.

DR. WOLFELT SHARES THESE FIVE CONNECTIONS WITH NATURE:

1. Nature softens normal symptoms of grief. When we incorporate nature as a healer, we transition from anxiety, depression, and stress to increased endorphins, self-esteem, resilience, and more. We recognize we must “befriend all emotions as part of our grief,” but nature can help us carry the load when they become too heavy.
2. Nature makes it easier to engage with the pain of grief in doses. Nature offers “grief hospitality; as space that does not force change, but offers change to take place within its safe space.”
3. Nature teaches us about the natural cycles of life and death. From the changing of the seasons to the cyclical nature of plant lives and animal migrations, we come to understand that “change, destruction and rebirth are fundamental to life on earth.”
4. Nature is truly our companion. Companionship is bearing witness, walking alongside, and holding safe space. This is nature, “steady and calming.”
5. Nature is a place we can be our natural selves. The outdoors are a neutral, non judgemental backdrop against which we can be who we are, just like the trees, clouds, rivers and critters. We accept nature as it is, inviting us to do the same for ourselves and one another.

DOSES OF NATURE INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE

We know now nature can be a healer for us. But where do we begin? In the second half of this book Dr. Wolfelt explores just that.

“As with all things in grief, there is no right or wrong way — there is only what works for you.” Whether you’re an avid explorer or prefer indoor comforts, integrating your grief journey with nature simply requires intentionality, regular dosage, and removing barriers of expectations.

GETTING OUT INTO NATURE: Think simple and nearby to start.

- Begin in your immediate surroundings by stepping out your front door. Begin to notice what’s around you: rocks, shrubs, trees...can you see the sky? You’re there. You’re in nature.
- Or get out into your neighborhood and community. Parks, gardens, and even cemeteries are often beautiful, quiet outdoor spaces perfect for contemplation.
- Choose activities engaging to you. Have a picnic, read a book, bird watch, join a club, play a game, volunteer, garden, exercise, watch a sunrise, learn about local flora and fauna. But don’t feel you need to take on extra effort or commitments if you’re not ready. Simply sitting in nature can be life changing.

BRINGING NATURE IN: Allow for curiosity and be open to changing your scenery.

- There have been countless studies on the positive impacts of looking at landscapes. Whether from a window, outdoor vantage point, or even on a screen helps us feel better, think better, and heal faster.
- We can incorporate nature into our homes through plants or fresh cut flowers. We can replace plastic baskets with ones made of seagrass, glass tables with ones of wood, empty end tables with collections of rocks and seashells. We can cover our walls with paintings and images or watch shows of our favorite landscapes and places.
- Our furry companions and choices of music also comfort our pain and bring smiles to our faces. From the food we eat to the smells of the candles and incense we burn, nature is always around us. It holds memories and opens the doors to healing.

“Grief is a wilderness,” Dr. Wolfelt says. But when we bring the wilds of our grief into the wilderness of our natural world we come to know we are not alone. We are all connected: humans, plants, rivers and mountains. Nature —like fellowship in our survivorhood— feeds the spirit and renews us. Nature heals.

You can find “Nature Heals” and other compassionate books like it at centerforloss.com.

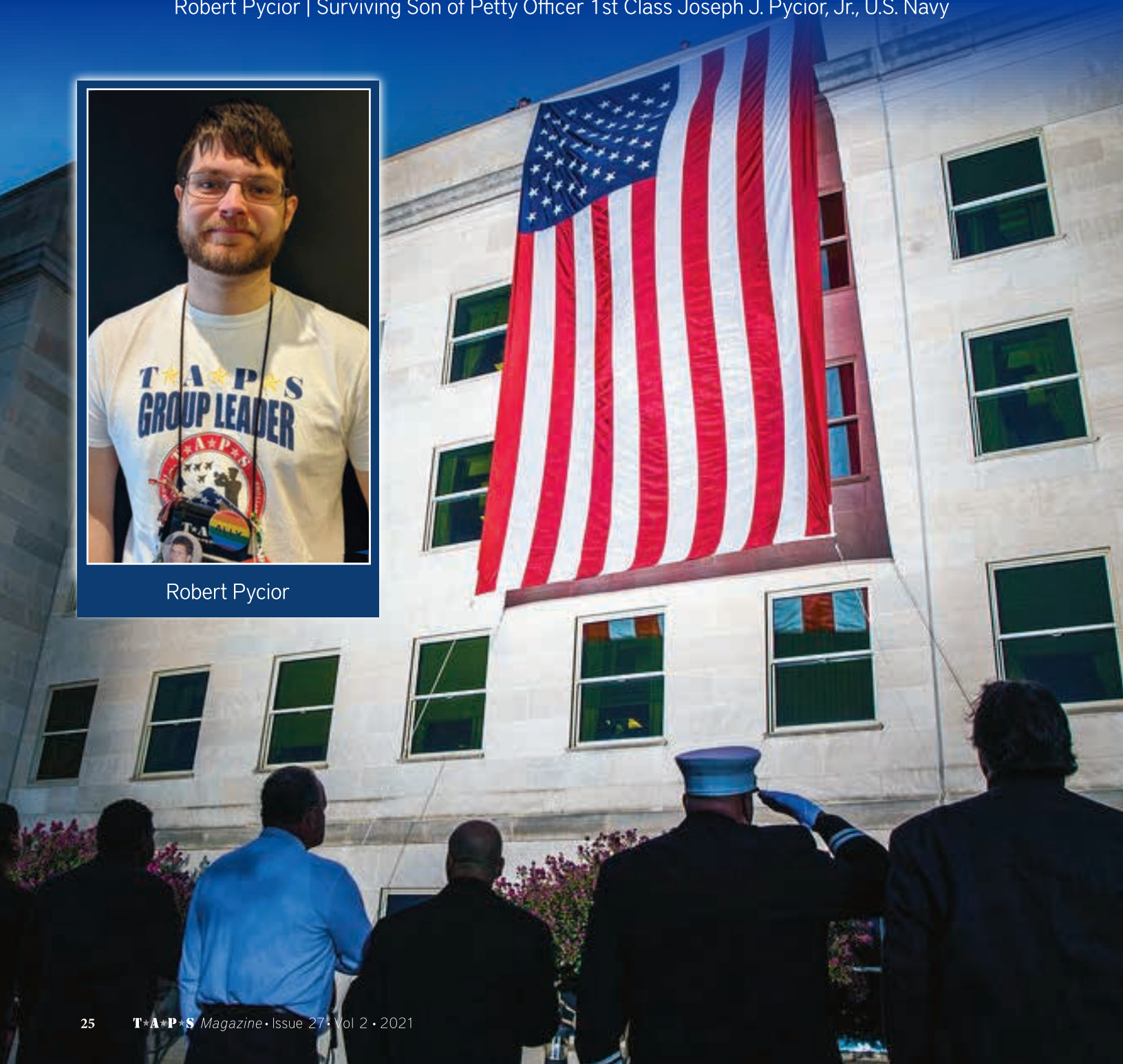
A LOOK BACK ON 9/11 AND TAPS SUPPORT

HOW ONE SURVIVOR CONTINUES TO GIVE TO OTHERS 20 YEARS LATER

Robert Pycior | Surviving Son of Petty Officer 1st Class Joseph J. Pycior, Jr., U.S. Navy



Robert Pycior



September 11, 2001, set the stage for this millennium. Looking back twenty years later, the impact of that day cannot be understated: the launch of the Global War on Terror, political changes across the globe, a transition to more heightened security, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and even animosity toward those who resembled the terrorists responsible.

The impact I felt most from that day, however, was the loss of my father, Joseph J. Pycior, Jr., who was killed while working in the Naval Command Center in the Pentagon. My family had to immediately adjust to life without Dad; we left military housing, switched from homeschooling to public school in New Jersey, and lost our connection to the military.

Life was never going to be the same.

Since I was a child at the time, I don't quite remember what happened and what TAPS did in the direct aftermath. I think I, like many when faced with significant trauma, went into survival mode. I remember there was support, there was food and there was something, or rather someone, missing. I distinctly remember a blue cloth TAPS bag my mom used to carry 9/11 related documents; she probably still has it somewhere . . .

RETURNING TO TAPS TO HELP OTHERS

I reconnected with TAPS years later in 2014, when I attended my first TAPS adult retreat in Austin, Texas. Though all of this was far outside my comfort zone, I decided an event strictly for surviving adult children would be a way to connect with people who understood what I was going through. TAPS offers gentle guidance to help people try something new on their grief journey; it is outside of our comfort zones where we find growth.

At this retreat I decided I wanted to serve as a Legacy Mentor, someone who once received the care of TAPS Military Mentors as a child in Good Grief Camp and now gives back and mentors other surviving children. The openness and encouragement of the other attendees and TAPS staff made my decision to come back as a Legacy Mentor an easy one. I felt it was a way for me to reconnect to my father's military service.



ROBERT SERVING AS A LEGACY MENTOR

As a Legacy Mentor, I have the opportunity to pass along my own experiences and knowledge to children and teens like me who lost a military loved one. As the years go by, I can see the growth in these young survivors as they continue on their own paths toward adulthood. I am amazed at the strength, resilience, and determination in TAPS children and hope I can foster those attributes in mentees for years to come.

I strongly believe that in helping others we help ourselves. TAPS provides an opportunity to have a positive impact on someone else. In the words of the late Mr. Fred Rogers: "Real strength has to do with helping others." TAPS affords me the opportunity to help.

"If anything can be gained from the loss of my father, it is knowing the monumental impact community and connection have in overcoming adversity."

A COMMUNITY WHO GETS IT

I have made friends from across the world who all have an ability to relate to my story of loss and resilience that others outside of TAPS just don't share. As the Legacy Mentors continue to grow into adulthood, we are now becoming the leaders and facilitators of the very programming we benefited from as children and teens. My transition from mentee to Legacy Mentor to now Good Grief Camp Group Leader highlights a journey forward in life, not only with TAPS but also with the loss of my father.

Through TAPS, I have had the opportunity to network, learn about different careers, meet with successful individuals who have helped provide a direction for me, and better develop my skills as a helper. It is no small



ROBERT SERVING AS A GROUP LEADER

coincidence that I became a social worker. I continue to gain new insight from every TAPS event I take part in.

If anything can be gained from the loss of my father, it is knowing the monumental impact community and connection have in overcoming adversity. TAPS, as well as other organizations that highlight the importance of peer connections and community, allowed me to reconnect with people who share the experience of loss. The challenges we all face in life can either define us or be the driving force that brings us together and motivates us to move forward.

SHARING OUR STORIES WITH THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

As we continue into the third decade since 9/11, I recognize life will forever be different than before — for our country and for me personally. The global nature of society today means we are able to experience a multitude of cultures, people and perspectives. But this reach isn't always a good thing. Hate can spread quicker than fire; and the internet, social media, and new and emerging technologies can all be accessed by those who wish to do harm.

In looking to the future, I believe we should all focus on what we can do to connect with others by sharing our stories and keeping memories alive. We should look to educate children in a proactive manner, prepare them for the inevitability of loss and help them in their journey through life. The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow. We all need to give them the tools they will need to create success; just as TAPS has given to me and just as I plan to continue to give to others.



WASHINGTON, D.C.



PHOENIX, ARIZONA



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TEAM TAPS & TAPS TOGETHERS

CARRY THE LOAD IN HONOR OF OUR NATION'S FALLEN HEROES

“It has been an honor to walk with so many gold star families this year on our national relay. To carry their loved ones and share their stories is what makes partnering with TAPS so impactful. We magnify our missions.”

~ Debbie Wright,

Executive Director of *Carry The Load*

PHOTOS: MARIE CAMPBELL; LEIGH EDMONDS; CHANTEL DOOLEY; BETTY MEDLOCK

Carry The Load's mission to restore the true meaning of Memorial Day was the inspiration of Navy SEALs Clint Bruce and Stephen Holley. Both grieving deaths of battle buddies, Carry The Load co-founders, Bruce and Holley, felt they returned from war to a nation that had forgotten such ultimate sacrifices.

The first official Carry The Load event was held on Memorial Day, 2011, featuring a 20-hour and 11-minute Memorial March. It provided “an active way to honor and remember our nation's heroes by connecting Americans to the sacrifices made by our military, veterans, first responders and their families.” Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, Carry The Load has grown into “Memorial May”—a nationwide month-long series of activities that kicks off at the end of April and concludes on Memorial Day.

This Memorial May, TAPS proudly partnered once again with Carry The Load as a national, non-profit partner. Team TAPS and TAPS Togethers joined forces for surviving families to participate and honor their loved ones in rally cities along four national relay routes (virtually and in-person) across the West Coast, Mountain States, Midwest, and East Coast. The relay routes culminated on May 30th with the Dallas Memorial March in Texas where our TAPS Dallas Care Group met for the conclusion of the event.



SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

MARIE CAMPBELL, SENIOR ADVISOR FOR TEAM TAPS AND OUTREACH SHARES:

“Every year TAPS has participated with Carry The Load has been special. With Carry The Load opening the additional routes, this year we have had our biggest turnout of TAPS families to date.

The Carry The Load mission is amazing, because it aligns so much with the specialty of our own TAPS mission. It's the organic healing that takes place as surviving military families, battle buddies, veterans, police officers, fire fighters, and first responders all come together with that load and release it along those miles. Each person has a story to tell, and everyone participating takes the time to ask one another, “Who are you carrying?” These are beautiful moments when you may meet someone for the first time, but they aren't a stranger.

We are so humbled to have this wonderful partnership with Carry The Load.”

WHEN YOU CAN'T HOLD A SERVICE RIGHT AWAY:

Tips for Planning a Future Ceremony and Following Through

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

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected grieving people in many difficult ways. At a time when you needed extra support from friends and family, you may have been separated from them altogether. You may have struggled even more to rebuild meaning and purpose in your life, if your options for exploring and connecting were hampered. And if anyone you care about died during the pandemic, social-distancing and travel restrictions likely severely limited the funeral ceremony and gathering of mourners, or postponed them altogether. This unfortunate situation may have compounded your existing grief.

Personalized, full funerals are so important because they help people embark on a helpful mourning path. They give us a structure in which to accept the reality of what happened, remember the person who died, share memories, support one another, express our feelings, and begin the process of finding meaning in life and death. On the other hand, when no ceremony is held, mourning is often never adequately initiated and can create long-term difficulties for

families and close friends. They have a much harder time fully acknowledging the reality of the death, which is an essential need of mourning. They also don't receive the crucial public affirmation and social support a funeral provides.

If you've been forced to postpone a full ceremony after a death, know that it is never too late, and I hope you'll consider planning one now to be held later. This article will help you, your family and friends plan a future ceremony and work together to follow through.

PLANNING NOW FOR LATER

Many families who've experienced a death during the pandemic are choosing limited or no ceremony and promising themselves they'll have a memorial service at some point down the road. Human nature being what it is, though, many of these possible ceremonies will never happen. To ensure they will, I recommend making specific plans now, or as soon after the death as possible.

The goal is to capture the family's and friends' early ideas about the future ceremony and share responsibilities — and accountability — among several people. Writing the plans down makes them even more concrete.

For example, I know a family whose patriarch recently died. This man had numerous friends and acquaintances. He also loved ice cream. The family held a closed, family-only funeral in their Catholic church — an excellent start and more than many families have been able to do — and announced in the obituary that they would be inviting the community to an ice-cream social later this year.

Will they actually have the ice-cream social? I don't know. I sure hope so. But I do know that conceiving of the ice-cream social idea itself makes it more likely, as does promising that specific future event in the obituary. Now this family has an image of a certain type of gathering in their minds, and their community members do too. Talk of it is bound to continue, and that can create the momentum the idea will need to blossom into reality.

GATHERING SPECIFICS

The more specific you can be in your ceremony preplanning, the more likely everyone is to assist in the follow-through. Whether you're a family member of the person who died or a friend of the family, you can help in the following ways.

- Start by initiating a conversation about what kind of ceremony and gathering you'd like to have in the future. You may want to hold a full, traditional memorial ceremony in a place of worship. Or you may want something less formal, like the ice-cream social idea or a cars-and-coffee event for a car buff or a garden gathering. The possibilities are endless.
- If the obituary hasn't yet been posted, you can include mention of this specific event in the obituary. This helps spread the news and keep everyone engaged.
- Think about a venue for the event and note some specifics, such as location ideas; and, if it's a public place, venue contact names and phone numbers.
- Consider who might lead the ceremony. If the family isn't already affiliated with a church or place of worship, look into independent celebrant options in the community. Whether it's a religious officiant, a lay celebrant, or a family host, you can jot down this person's name, phone number, and email address. And then — this is key — have someone make an initial contact with the celebrant to stay on course.
- Based on the life of the person who died as well as the passions and talents of family members and friends, think about appropriate music, readings, memorabilia displays, and more. Write them down.

- Brainstorm who could help with parts of the ceremony, such as the eulogy, readings, a tribute video, or refreshments. The greater the number of people who feel invited to be part of the future experience, the better. In fact, inviting those helpers now, even if the ceremony is months away, makes the planning start to gel and helps everyone feel committed to and part of this important event. Add a few notes about this, and also write down ideas about who to invite to the ceremony.
- Think about a future date that might work for the memorial service. Having a prospective date on the calendar and in everyone's minds makes the concept real. Even if you can't pinpoint an exact date, you can probably envision a month maybe even which part of that month. Sometimes a special date might pop up in the conversation, such as a birthday or anniversary, that would make a suitable ceremony date.
- Make copies of what you have written down and give one to each person who might be part of the ceremony in some way. Also be sure to notify primary guests about the plans and possible dates so they can begin to make arrangements to attend.

Of course, not only are meaningful funerals and memorial services rites of initiation of healthy mourning, during a pandemic they can also be something for friends and family to mark on their future calendars and look forward to. Right now we all need hope, which is an expectation of a good thing that is yet to be. The ceremony to be held in the months to come will create hope for the hugs, stories, laughs, tears, and listening that will take place when everyone gathers. Yes, the occasion will also be sad, but, most of all, it will bless everyone who attends with love and support.

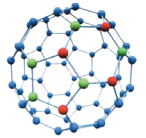
*Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a longtime TAPS supporter and member of the TAPS Advisory Board, serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (coauthored with Bonnie Carroll, TAPS President and Founder) and *Creating Meaningful Funerals: A Guide for Families*. Visit centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books.*



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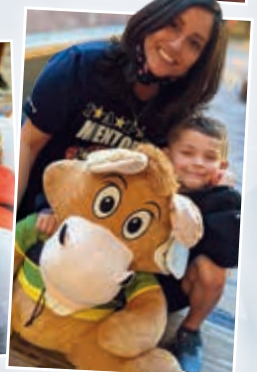
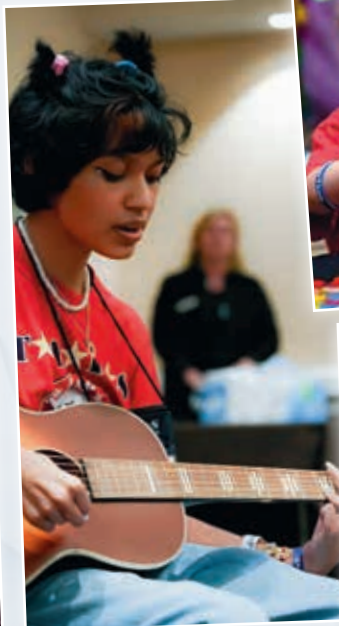


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Special appreciation is extended to the Fisher House Hero Miles Program. For more information on how to donate your frequent flyer miles, go to fisherhouse.org/programs/hero-miles.

Thank you to our incredible partners for ensuring the TAPS mission continues and that our grieving military families could come together in commemoration of this most sacred Memorial Day Weekend event—the 27th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SUPPORTING TAPS EVENTS OR PROGRAMS, VISIT TAPS.ORG/SUPPORT.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NESSA CHASE; STEPHEN GALVAN; ARI STRAUSS; CATHERINE CARBULLIDO



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when the world comes
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it's okay to let others
help pick up the pieces
if we're present to take
part in your happiness
when your circumstances
are great
we are more than capable
of sharing your
pain – community

~ Rupi Kaur

