

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

TAPS®

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS MAGAZINE | SUMMER 2022



WHAT'S INSIDE: UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF ★ PLEASE SAY THEIR NAME
NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR RECAP ★ GRIEF IS A PATH BEST SHARED

Remember Me

Anthony Dowson

Speak of me as you have always done,
Remember the good times, laughter, and fun.

Share the happy memories we've made,
Do not let them wither or fade.

I'll be with you in the summer's sun,
And when the winter's chill has come.

I'll be the voice that whispers in the breeze,
I'm peaceful now, put your mind at ease.

I've rested my eyes and gone to sleep,
But memories we've shared, are yours to keep.

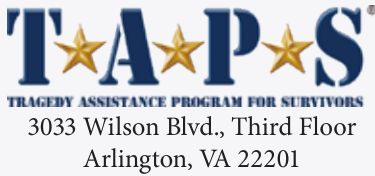
Sometimes our final days, may be a test,
But remember me, when I am at my best.

Although things may not be the same,
Don't be afraid to use my name.

Let your sorrow last for just a while,
Comfort each other and try to smile.

I've lived a life full of joy and fun.
Live on now, make me proud of what you'll become.





Founder and President

Bonnie Carroll

Editor

Dominique Giuffrida

Art Director

Jennifer Bonney

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 - ★ Peer-Based Support Network
 - ★ Survivor Care Team
- ★ Community-Based Care Connection
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 - ★ Grief & Trauma Resources
 - ★ Education Support Services
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 - ★ Men's Program
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- ★ Youth Programs: Good Grief Camps
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ON THE COVER

Two young survivors connect and share memories of their loved one at the Southeast Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp in Jacksonville, FL, in February 2022.

PHOTO BY LEIGH EDMONDS, TAPS

ABOUT TAPS

Caring for the Families of America's Fallen Heroes

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, we are a family of military survivors ready to embrace and connect all who grieve the death of a military loved one with resources, services, and programs. TAPS provides support to survivors regardless of the manner of death, the duty status at the time of death, the survivor's relationship to the deceased, or the survivor's phase in their grief journey. At TAPS, we open our hearts and resources to the world with our award-winning programs and services to support all military bereaved. TAPS is fortunate to work with leading experts in the fields of grief, bereavement, trauma, and peer support to integrate decades of research on military grief into action to help heal hearts.

At TAPS, we:

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

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

Connect: We connect all those grieving a military death 24/7 to a nationwide network of peer-based, emotional survivor support and critical casework assistance.

Educate: We inform and educate using research-informed best practices in bereavement and trauma care for survivors and advocate on behalf of survivors with policy and legislative priorities.

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

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



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NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR
SEMINAR SPONSORS

To our TAPS families,



Welcome to the 2022 Summer Issue of our TAPS Magazine, your journal of hope and healing. We hope you find comfort in articles written by fellow military survivors and leading grief professionals. This magazine is our family publication with resources and information to help us connect, share, and find strength for our journeys.

TAPS was founded 28 years ago on a simple premise— to provide compassionate care and resources for all those grieving the death of a military loved one. After my husband died in an Army plane crash, my greatest comfort was in the company of others who had lost their Soldiers that day too. We understood and could support each other in ways no one else could. That's the magic of TAPS— regardless of how or where our military loved ones died, our pride in their lives of selfless service to our country forever bonds us.

Built by surviving military family members, TAPS is a nonprofit organization offering critical services and resources for military loss survivors to fill gaps in governmental support. We offer a light in the darkness, a calm in the chaos, and a constant loving community. You are not alone— we are the friends you can call anytime, and we will be there.

We are available around the clock offering support through our 24/7 TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline. Our Survivor Care Team— a dedicated group of peer professionals who are survivors with specialized training and education— will meet you wherever you are in your grief journey, guide you to available resources, and arrange free and unlimited counseling. We can also connect you with a trained Peer Mentor who has experienced a similar loss and will be an understanding companion. Likewise, our TAPS Casework team— including former military casualty staff, benefits experts, and survivors with advanced degrees— stands ready to assist you with any other challenges. From the initial resource kit we send to the Peer Mentor training we offer, TAPS is a loving family here for you now and always.

TAPS network of support and care reaches across the country, your local communities, and the comfort of your own homes. You can connect with fellow survivors during various programs, such as weekend-long Survivor Seminars for adults and Good Grief Camps for children; multi-day Women's Empowerment, Men's, and Young Adults Retreats; multi-day Family Camps; one-day sporting events, TAPS Together, and Care Groups. You can also engage with your TAPS family through online groups, workshops, and webinars.

You are a treasured part of our TAPS family. Thank you for helping make our organization strong and sharing your loved ones with us. They are forever etched not only on a memorial marker but also in our hearts and souls, and we cherish them.

With love and care,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bonnie". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bonnie Carroll ★ TAPS President and Founder



Dear TAPS...

NOT ALONE

I didn't connect with TAPS right away after my sons passing. For me, I thought I could handle everything on my own. When I finally opened up to TAPS, I found it was the best thing I could do for myself. I discovered that I was not alone in my pain, was able to express my feelings, and learned that what I was feeling as I grieved was normal. TAPS became my comfortable place to be. Through the next several years of losing my son, TAPS has helped me understand that I will always grieve him, but it is okay to laugh and smile again. It has not been a easy journey, but with the help of our TAPS family, I can make the changes in my life that I never would have thought possible.

Michele Nawrot

Surviving Mother of U.S. Army
Captain Stephen Michael Nawrot

HEALING

I can't tell you how much you and the mentors at the camp have changed [my daughter] Kayley's life. In my mind, I will always have the image of her sitting on the curb at Fort Lewis back in 2007 with such a somber and sad look about her, not wanting to let go of that balloon. I look at her now and see the smile on her face, and watch her grow every year she comes to camp. Without TAPS, our children would not grow into who they are becoming. Thank you for always being there for us and our children.

Jennifer Henderson

Surviving Spouse of U.S.
Army Sergeant First Class
Christopher Henderson

COMMUNITY

I didn't find out about TAPS until recently, and for me it has been like a homecoming. Since joining the TAPS Peer Mentor program, my first year has been a whirlwind of emotions. There is something special about learning the ability of relating to others with simple understanding, and contributing to a larger community of helping people to alleviate heartache for just a brief moment in time. While we all have our own journey to travel, it constantly amazes me how much a talk, a walk, or a hug can do for another person's wellbeing. I don't want anyone to ever feel what I felt before, or that they are alone in what they are going through... and I can think of no better way for me to spend my time than with others who know what I'm going through.

Matthew Navas

Surviving Brother-in-Law of U.S.
Marine Corps Lance Corporal
Shayne Matthew Cabino

THE JOURNEY

TAPS has been a huge part of my grief journey. When I attend the seminars, I am able to just be myself. I don't feel like I have to wear a mask because everyone there is going through what I am going through. I always learn something from the speakers and the groups to help me along my grief journey. I feel that if I hadn't found TAPS, that I wouldn't be where I am today.

Deborah Clevenger

Surviving Mother of U.S. Navy
Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Petty
Officer Timothy Clevenger



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

PHOTOS: PEXELS.COM/COTTONBRO; TAPS ARCHIVES



UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF

Ten Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart

PART 3 of 4

Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD ★ TAPS Advisory Board

*This article is the third part of a four-part series excerpted and greatly condensed from the second edition of Dr. Wolfelt's classic book, *Understanding Your Grief*, first published in 1992. In this series, Dr. Wolfelt covers his Ten Touchstones—essential physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual signs for mourners to seek out on their journey through grief.*

THE TEN ESSENTIAL TOUCHSTONES:

1. Open to the Presence of Your Loss
2. Dispel Misconceptions About Grief
3. Embrace the Uniqueness of Your Grief
4. Explore Your Feelings of Loss
5. Understand the Six Needs of Mourning
6. Recognize You Are Not Crazy
7. Nurture Yourself
8. Reach Out for Help
9. Seek Reconciliation, Not Resolution
10. Appreciate Your Transformation

TOUCHSTONE FIVE UNDERSTAND THE SIX NEEDS OF MOURNING

When we are in mourning, we share the same basic needs. Unlike the stages of grief you might have heard about, the six needs of mourning aren't orderly or predictable. You will probably jump around randomly as you work on these six needs of mourning. You will address each need when you are ready to do so. And sometimes, you will be working on more than one need at a time.



Recall the important distinction between grief and mourning—grief is what you think and feel on the inside; mourning is when you express those thoughts and feelings outside of yourself. Notice that we do not call the following six needs of mourning, the Six Needs of Grief. Why? While you will naturally experience all of them internally, you will also need to intentionally and proactively engage with them externally to journey toward healing. Your awareness of the following six needs of mourning will help you take a participative, action-oriented approach to heal grief, rather than thinking of grief as something you passively experience.

MOURNING NEED 1: Acknowledge the Reality of the Death

This first need of mourning involves gently confronting the reality that someone you care about will never physically be present in your life again. Whether the death was

sudden or anticipated, acknowledging the full reality of your loss will unfold slowly, over weeks and months. It's normal to move back and forth between evading and encountering this reality. Encountering this reality is, in fact, such a difficult task that it can only be accomplished a little bit at a time, in small doses.

MOURNING NEED 2: Embrace the Pain of the Loss

We must embrace the pain of our grief—something we naturally don't want to do. After all, it's easier to avoid, repress, or deny the pain of grief than to greet it head-on, yet we learn to reconcile ourselves by confronting our pain. Unfortunately, our culture tends to encourage the denial of pain. We misunderstand the role of suffering and believe that doing well with your grief means becoming well-acquainted with your pain. Don't let others deny you this critical mourning need.



MOURNING NEED 3: **Remember the Person Who Died**

Do you have a relationship with someone after they die? Of course. You have a relationship of memory. Precious memories, dreams reflecting the significance of the relationship, and objects that link you to the person who died (such as photos, souvenirs, clothing, etc.) are examples of some things that give testimony to a different form of a continued relationship. Embracing your memories can be a very slow and, at times, painful process. Go slowly and be patient with yourself. In general, remembering the past makes hoping for the future possible. Your future will become open to new experiences only to the extent that you embrace the past.

MOURNING NEED 4: **Develop a New Self-Identity**

Your personal identity, or self-perception, is the result of the ongoing process of establishing a sense of who you are. Part of your self-identity comes from the relationships you have with other people. When someone with whom you have a relationship dies, your self-identity, or the way you see yourself, naturally changes. You may have gone from being a “wife” or “husband” to a “widow” or “widower.” You may have gone from being a “parent” to a “bereaved parent.” The way you define yourself and the way society defines you is changed. Remember—do what you need to do to survive for now as you try to re-anchor yourself. Be compassionate with yourself. Reach out for and accept the support of others.

MOURNING NEED 5: **Search for Meaning**

When someone you love dies, it's normal to question the meaning and purpose of life.

You will probably reconsider your life philosophy and explore religious and spiritual values as you work on this need. Be sure to express your search for meaning outside of yourself. When thoughts and feelings about meaning and purpose naturally arise (and they will!), talk to a good listener about them. If you're struggling with practical meaning-of-life issues, such as searching for reasons to get out of bed in the morning, consider seeing a grief counselor or other care provider until you regain your footing.

MOURNING NEED 6: **Let Others Help You – Now and Always**

The quality and quantity of understanding support you get during your work of mourning will have a major influence on your capacity to heal. You cannot—nor should you try to—do this alone. Drawing on the experiences and encouragement of friends, fellow grievers, and professional counselors is not a weakness but a healthy human need. And because mourning is a process that takes place over time, this support must be available months, and even years, after the death of someone in your life.

TOUCHSTONE SIX **RECOGNIZE YOU ARE NOT CRAZY**

In all my years as a grief counselor, the most common question grieving people have asked me is, “Am I going crazy?” The terrain of the journey through grief can be so foreign and disorienting, and our behaviors in that terrain can feel so out of whack, that we often feel like we're going crazy. But rest assured, you're not going crazy—you're grieving. The following are several common thoughts and feelings in grief that cause mourners to feel like they're going crazy.

SELF-FOCUS

Especially early in your grief, you may find yourself being less aware of the needs of others than you usually are. You may not want to listen to other people's problems. You might not have the energy to attend to all the needs of your children, other family members, friends, or colleagues. The compulsion to focus only on your thoughts and feelings doesn't mean you're going crazy— it means that you need to focus on yourself right now.

RETHINKING AND RETELLING YOUR STORY

What has happened to you—the death of someone you love—is so hard to fathom that your mind compels you to revisit it and revisit it and revisit it until you've truly acknowledged and embraced it. Whether you're conscious of this fact, you tell yourself and others the story of the loss to integrate it into your life. Try to surround yourself with people who allow and encourage you to repeat whatever you need to repeat. Support groups are helpful to many grievers because members share a mutual understanding of the need to tell the story and to have others listen.

SUDDEN CHANGES IN MOOD

When someone loved dies, you may feel like you're surviving fairly well one minute and then feel in the depths of despair the next. Sudden mood changes can be a difficult yet normal part of your grief journey. One minute you might be feeling okay, the next lousy. So if you have these ups and downs, don't be hard on yourself. Instead, practice patience. As you do the work of mourning and move toward healing, periods of hopefulness will replace periods of hopelessness more and more.

POWERLESSNESS AND HELPLESSNESS

Your grief can, at times, leave you feeling powerless. Almost paradoxically, by acknowledging and allowing for temporary feelings of helplessness, you help yourself. When you try to “stay strong,” you often get yourself into trouble. Instead, surrender to your vulnerability. Share your feelings with caring people around you. Remember that shared grief diminishes grief, so find someone to talk to who will listen without judging.

GRIEF ATTACKS OR GRIEFBURSTS

Before they come to grief, many people expect grief to be made up mostly of long periods of deep depression. Actually,



after the early weeks, you're more likely to encounter acute and episodic pangs or spasms of grief—I call them “griefbursts”—in-between relative pain-free hours. Griefbursts may feel like “crazybursts,” but they're normal. When and if one strikes you, be compassionate with yourself.

CRYING AND SOBBING

If you're crying and sobbing a lot, you may feel like you're out of control, which can, in turn, trigger you to feel crazy. But sobbing and wailing come from the inner core of your being. They are expressions of true, deep, and strong emotions within you. These emotions need to get out, and sobbing allows for their release.

LINKING OBJECTS

If you like to hold, be near, look at, sleep with, caress, or smell a special belonging of the person who died, you're not crazy. You're simply trying to hold on to a tangible, physical connection to the person. The person's body is no longer physically here, but these special items are. Like the woman who slept with her husband's shirt, you'll probably need your linking objects less and less over time as you integrate the loss into your life. But you may always find these items special, and you may always want to keep them.

DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE

When someone loved dies, quickly quelling your feelings of grief may be tempting. This desire to avoid and mask the pain is understandable. The trouble is that using drugs and alcohol to help you do so only brings temporary relief from a hurt that you must ultimately embrace. Instead of relying on their deceptive comfort, I urge you to turn to your fellow human beings for support. Reconciliation of grief comes through the ongoing expression of thoughts and feelings, not through drug-induced repression.

DREAMS

Dreaming a lot about the person who died can contribute to your feelings of going crazy. Mourners sometimes tell me that they can't stop thinking about the death—even in their sleep! Keep in mind, though, that dreaming is one way the work of mourning takes place. If dreams are part of your trek through the wilderness, use them to understand better where you have been, where you are, and where you are going in your grief journey. Also, find a skilled listener who won't interpret your dreams for you, but will instead listen to you talk about them.

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

When someone you love dies, you may have experiences that are not always rationally explainable. That doesn't mean you're crazy! Communicating with the person who died is the primary form of mystical experience that grieving people have taught me. These experiences range from sensing a presence to feeling a touch, hearing a voice, seeing a vision,

receiving a sign, and many more. If you count yourself among them, you're not going crazy. You can still be very sane and exceedingly rational while experiencing and embracing mystical encounters at times. Who on earth is to say what's real and what isn't? Certainly not I. Remain open to these experiences and be thankful for any comfort they provide.

ANNIVERSARIES, HOLIDAYS, AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Naturally, holidays and special occasions can bring about pangs of grief or full-on griefbursts. If you find yourself having a really tough time on special days, you're not crazy. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that your feelings are natural. Alert the people who care about you that you'll need their understanding and empathy. Unfortunately, some grieving people will choose not to mention special dates to friends and family members. So as a result, they suffer in silence and their feelings of isolation and craziness increase. Don't let this happen to you. Recognize you will need support, and map out how to get it!

TOUCHSTONE SEVEN NURTURE YOURSELF

Over many years of walking with people in grief, I have discovered that most of us are hard on ourselves when in mourning. We judge and shame ourselves while taking care of ourselves last. But, good self-care is essential to your survival. Practicing good self-care doesn't mean you're feeling sorry for yourself or being self-indulgent; rather, you're creating conditions that allow you to integrate the death of someone loved into your heart and soul.

NURTURING YOURSELF PHYSICALLY

As you journey through grief, your body may let you know that it feels distressed. Trouble sleeping and low energy are among the most common physical responses to loss. You may also feel unwell or experience muscle aches and pains, shortness of breath, feelings of emptiness in your stomach, tightness in your throat and chest, or digestive problems. Sensitivity to noise, heart palpitations, queasiness, nausea, headaches, increased allergic



reactions, changes in appetite, weight loss or gain, agitation, and generalized tension are all other ways your body may react to the death of someone loved.

Good physical self-care is important, and your body is your house. Just as your house requires care and maintenance to protect you from the outside elements, your body requires that you honor and treat it with respect. You may not feel in control of how your body is responding, but keep in mind that it's communicating the stress you're experiencing with you.

NURTURING YOURSELF COGNITIVELY

Thinking normally after the death of someone precious to you would be very unlikely. Don't be surprised if you struggle with short-term memory problems, find it hard to focus or concentrate, have trouble making simple decisions, or think you may be going crazy. Essentially, your mind is in shock, disorientation, and confusion. Your mind needs time to catch up with and process your new reality. In the meantime, don't expect too much of your cognitive powers.

NURTURING YOURSELF EMOTIONALLY

The important thing to remember is that we honor our feelings when we pay attention to them. Whenever a grief feeling arises, I encourage you to notice it and let it absorb your full attention for at least a few minutes. Remember- it's another facet of your love for the person who died, and it's there for a reason. It's trying to teach you something about the story of your loss or your needs moving forward.

NURTURING YOURSELF SOCIALLY

Your link to family, friends, and community is vital for your sense of well-being and belonging. The death of someone you love has probably resulted

in a very real sense of disconnection from the world around you. When you reach out to your family and friends, you begin to reconnect. You open your heart to love again and be loved in return when you reach out to others.

If you don't nurture the warm, kind relationships that still exist in your life, you will probably continue to feel disconnected and isolated. You may even withdraw into your own little cave in the wilderness, continuing to grieve but not mourn. Isolation can become the barrier that keeps you stuck in the wilderness and prevents your grief from softening over time. So, allow your friends and family to nurture you. Let them in, and rejoice in the connection. And if you have to be the one to reach out and strengthen relationships, that's OK, too. You will find that it is worth every bit of the effort.

NURTURING YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY

When you are torn apart by grief, you may have many spiritual questions for which there are no easy answers: Is there a God? Why me? Will life ever be worth living again? This natural human tendency to search for meaning after a death (which is the fifth need of mourning!) is why, if I could, I would encourage all of us grievers to put down "Nurture my spirit" at the top of our daily to-do lists.

However, I recognize that for some people, contemplating a spiritual life amid the pain of grief can be difficult. But grief is first and primarily a spiritual journey through the wilderness. Attending to, embracing, and expressing your grief is a spiritual practice- even when you've lost your faith or struggled to regain meaning and purpose.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF TODAY?

Of course, good self-care is always important, but it's even more essential when you're in grief. If you're not taking extra-tender care of yourself physically, cognitively, emotionally, socially, and spiritually, you won't have the energy or resources to work on the six needs of mourning, the essential aspects of self-care in grief.

So whenever possible, I hope you will stop whatever you're busy with and take a moment to ask yourself, "What am I doing today to take good care of myself?" If you can devote even a few minutes every day to each aspect of self-care, you will be equipping yourself with the basic supplies you need for the journey.

Editor's Note

*This article is the third part of a four-part series excerpted and greatly condensed from the second edition of Dr. Wolfelt's classic book, **Understanding Your Grief**, first published in 1992. Recently published in September 2021, **Understanding Your Grief - Second Edition** adds brief passages on topics ranging from vulnerability, soulmate grief, and complicated grief to mindfulness, the power of ritual, and more to the original bestseller.*

Visit taps.org/magazine to access Part One of this series in the 2021 TAPS Fall Magazine and Part Two in the 2022 TAPS Spring Magazine. While this article series will give you a taste of **Understanding Your Grief - Second Edition**, you will find the entire book a helpful companion at centerforloss.com. It is also available in a daily reader version titled, *365 Days of Understanding Your Grief*.

About the Author

An internationally noted author, educator, grief counselor, and TAPS Advisory Board Member, Dr. Wolfelt serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the University of Colorado Medical School Department of Family Medicine faculty. He has written many books that help people mourn. Visit centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and find Dr. Wolfelt's books.



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The Word “Widow” Doesn’t Cut It

Sonia Rai ★ Honoring U.S. Air Force Captain John Graziano



The other day, someone asked me whether I would consider myself a widow.

I know that people need labels, but honestly, I haven't thought much into what I would call myself. Things have been confusing recently.

The number of times that question has come up has caused me to ask myself what John and I were. What was he to me and me to him?

Was he my "boyfriend?" No... the word itself sounds so trivial. The word "partner" seems to fit, but doesn't seem to capture the gravity of our relationship. So then there's "husband" or "spouse," which for some reason, seem to be the terms that carry the most legitimacy; but apparently, John and I missed out on the paperwork and fees that those terms require. So... oh well.

But when I sit and think about it, even if he were my husband and I was his widow... those words just, frankly, seem to fall flat. There's an emptiness to them, a vagueness regarding the journey and path our relationship carved into who we were and who I am.

What is the emotional difference between a boyfriend, partner, and husband? And, why does it matter so much to people? Honestly, I don't know. I guess people need to make as much sense out of senseless events as possible, and the labels help.

But, I can't help people with that. I don't know if I would consider myself a widow for one simple reason: I didn't lose my husband.

John wasn't my husband, not even a little bit. He was so much more— a part of my spirit, a soulmate. I lost the person that made me, *me*.

Is there a word for that?

John wasn't my husband, but I would listen to his heartbeat for fun. Forty-two beats per minute. It was the... slowest... heartbeat... I had ever heard. When we were lying around together, bored on the weekend, I would ask if I could listen to it. It fascinated me: how I could fit two of my heartbeats into his one— how even our inner workings seemed to balance one another out.



Sonia Rai honors U.S. Air Force Captain John Graziano, who died in an aviation accident in 2018. Sonia, a TAPS Peer Mentor, permitted TAPS to share this blog from her website, Grounseling.com.

He wasn't my husband, but I enjoyed hearing him live. Literally, that slow rhythmic beat told me I was not alone in this world. That I was his, and he was mine. I didn't lose my husband, but I lost that. What is the word for that?

He wasn't my husband, but we would talk about the future. The real future. Not about the wedding and dresses and engagement rings, but of the struggle that would come with married life. The arduous nature of military life and how he would miss out on the kids' birthday parties because of deployments, and how he would have to cope with the inevitable moments where I might feel resentful that I had to give up everything I knew to support his career. We would talk about it. The struggle of a life together where we knew we would have to fight to make each other happy and recommit ourselves to each other every single day. I didn't lose my husband, but I lost the promise and chance of a future with someone who would fight with me and for me.

A friend of mine once described the nature of relationships and said that people start off as squares and that life chips away at us until we whittle into little jig-saw pieces. And at some point, we meet someone who just "slots" into pieces missing from us. And that person makes you not fully whole but makes you just a bit better. They make life a little less scary and you a lot more fearless. I lost that.

John told me once that I "helped heal the broken parts of him," and he did the same for me. And he died. Even the word "died" doesn't seem to fit: he was ripped away, wrenched out of my life. And for a while there, my life felt like it was punishment.

He died; he wasn't my husband or my spouse. I am not his widow. But that hasn't stopped him from continuing to fight for me and our love in ways that I simply cannot explain.

We never married, but I know that three days after he died, I watched my phone ring while his name inexplicably flashed across the screen. I know that my five-year-old niece started saying phrases shared only between him and me.

He wasn't my husband, but I know the first time I spoke out loud to him was a month after he died, and I asked if he was proud of me. And when I got home that day and opened my apartment door, a red balloon floated in from literally who knows where and nestled at my feet.

What is the word for when someone dies, yet they keep showing up for you? What's the word?

I know he's dead. Not my husband but my partner. My best friend. I know he's gone, but I also know that he's found ways to make sure that even though I'm struggling with emotions that range from agony to grotesque indifference, I've never had to deal with feeling lonely. Because I somehow still know he's here, whispering, guiding, and loving.

I know he's dead, and people need a way to refer to me, so the best thing I can come up with right now is that I'm not a widow because I'm still very much his girl. His person. His best friend. In heart and body and soul. And those are the only labels that really ever mattered.

How *Nature* Can Help Us *Heal*

Erin Jacobson ★ Surviving Partner of U.S. Army Ranger Cpl. Jason Kessler

My senses were in overdrive. My ears filled with the sounds of my feet plodding on dirt and the swish of my arms against my backpack. I heard birds singing and the wind moving through the trees. My nostrils filled with the sharp scent of pine trees. The sun toasted my skin. All around me I could see the breathtaking beauty of Eastern Montana, but the sensation of burning muscles consumed me.

I had moved to Montana after Jason's death. I didn't know what to do, but knew I needed to change my life in some way because I felt completely lost without the man I loved. I had spent almost a decade building a life with Jason. Now, I didn't know what to build alone. The bedrock I had based my life on shattered, and I was left standing in

the darkness and ruins. Not only had I lost Jason, but I had also lost myself. Who was I in this world without him?

I knew that I needed to get away from the life we shared together, and moving to another state to be with our friends seemed like a good idea. So there I was, trying to reach the top of a mountain.

My internal monologue said, "One more step, Erin. Just think about one step at a time. One more step, and then the next step."

My thighs and calves screamed from climbing. My back ached from my large pack, and a recent horsefly bite left a sharp pain. My friends, Jess and Peder, disappeared ahead of me, so they could set

up camp before darkness settled in. They were avid mountaineers and had climbed extensively for years. Peder even carried his 3-year-old son up the mountain with us, and easily bypassed me. Although I grew up hiking, this was my first time climbing anything to this scale. And, it was hard.

Over my heaving, I heard the rhythm of jogging feet above me. "Do you want me to carry your pack for you, Erin?" Peder asked. I smiled tiredly up at him, "Thank you so much, but no. I want to finish what I started."

He smiled back at me, gave me some words of encouragement, and headed back up to camp. In the distance, I could see a ridge with newly raised tents. I was almost there.





My internal monologue said, "One more step, Erin. Just think about one step at a time. One more step, and then the next step."

It was a struggle, but I completed the last push up the mountain. When I arrived at camp, I paused. Aside from my friends, not a soul was in sight. I began to notice small things: the green of some moss growing on a fallen log, tiny insects crawling on a nearby leaf, and the vast, blue sky — so deep and unending. It was a strange dichotomy of feeling tiny, and yet completely at peace. The surrounding nature was wild, but I felt safer than I had in a long time.

In the 15 years since Jason died, the memory of that day has revisited me time and again. That climb and what I witnessed there has been my teacher. During that incredibly dark period of my life, when I didn't know what to trust or believe in anymore, I could look to nature to help me make sense of it all.

Although my friends couldn't make the climb for me, they could walk with me. Similarly on the grief journey, even though I have to carry my own burden of loss, others offering to hold it for a while gives

me the strength to keep going. Knowing I don't have to go through it alone, strengthens me.

On the trail when I focused on the bright spots of the flowers and the sweet song of the birds, I climbed faster. When I spent time in conversation with my friends while climbing the mountain, we laughed and connected with one another. When my focus was on the pain and discomfort while walking alone, the climb was so much harder.

On the trail the small hurt of the horsefly bite and scratches from branches weren't extreme, but on top of exhaustion and the pain in my muscles they bothered me more than expected. It was at that moment, I realized I have a choice in what I devote my energy to.

Over the years I have experienced moments of needling pain, like going to dinner parties and being the only one without a partner. Or, "oohing" and "aahing" over a friend's new baby or tales from a vacation with their spouse, while fighting the complex emotions of jealousy and otherness.

So often in grief, the lives we find ourselves in have little to do with our choices. We didn't choose for our loved ones to die. We didn't choose to suddenly be a childless parent or a single mother or a sister without a brother. We question, "How can this be my life?" But, what I have found is that within these circumstances, we still have the opportunity to choose how we respond. Similar to what I discovered on the trail, we can choose where we devote our energy, time and thoughts.

When the grief waves hit I now know going outside is not a miracle cure, but it is something that will bring me back to my center. Nature helps me make some sense of what I cannot understand. Because even in times of apparent chaos, in nature there is an order to everything. Even during my darkest moments, it's been in nature where I always find affirmations of hope. Walking and seeing a bird's nest or a bit of grass growing through a crack in some concrete, teaches me a lesson about my own resilience and the power of life.

Care *within* YOUR COMMUNITY

Allow TAPS to build a community of compassionate care around you. Request a Community Resource Report by calling 800-959-TAPS (8277).

In addition to peer support and services that TAPS provides, we also connect you to grief resources close to home.

Upon request, TAPS provides a detailed report of support within your community. We do research and make the phone calls to ensure the available groups are an appropriate fit for you. We find out if groups are actively meeting, when the next meeting will be and what you can expect the first time you go. These TAPS Community Resource Reports are provided at no cost to you, and we tailor the information to fit your needs.

If you have found yourself leaning on drugs or alcohol to help you cope with the loss of your loved one, TAPS can help. We work with community partners to ensure the underlying issues are addressed and your needs met. We will connect you directly to our community partners who will work with your insurance company. TAPS is here for you and will support you without judgment.

TAPS also hosts our own local support groups; TAPS Care Groups. Our monthly care groups provide survivors with a truly understanding environment where you can find hope and comfort from your TAPS family. If you live near a TAPS Care Group, we will provide that information in your Community Resource Report. You can also visit our TAPS Care Group calendar, using the QR code below, to find a care group near you.



*TAPS.org/Community
ResourceReports*



*TAPS Care
Groups Calendar*



TAPS Ukraine

In 2015, the U.S. Department of State asked TAPS to mentor Ukraine in developing a program of support for the families of those who had died in the war there in 2014. It was our honor to accept this opportunity, and we immediately began meeting with our Ukrainian counterparts, the widows, parents, children, and siblings of those who had died. We found we had so much in common. Just like our TAPS families, they were grieving their loved ones while also honoring their service in defense of freedom. Their hearts were broken, and they were so grateful to know that there were American military surviving families who were thinking about them and also understood their grief.

During our first trip to Ukraine in 2017, we met with surviving family members who were so anxious to share their stories and tell us about their loved ones. We also met with the Ukrainian military leadership, who appreciated the mission of TAPS and encouraged us to train Ukrainian surviving family members to start their own organization. Over the years, we have taken teams from TAPS to Kyiv and Dnipro to do training in establishing a peer mentor program, a Good Grief Camp for the children, resources for

coping with grief and traumatic loss, and support services that could heal hearts and coordinate care across every oblast (similar to our “states”).

In February 2019, TAPS signed a memorandum of understanding with our new sister organization, TAPS Ukraine, officially recognizing this entirely Ukrainian organization created in the model of TAPS peer-based care for all those grieving the death of military loved ones. It was important to the families in Ukraine that they make the connection with America by naming their organization “TAPS Ukraine” and we are so proud to stand with them in this way.

TAPS Ukraine has supported thousands of Ukrainians grieving military loved ones through seminars and retreats, resources and information about grief and trauma, and connections for Ukrainian survivors with professional trauma counseling.

Since February 24, 2022, we have watched as Ukrainians are once again responding with inspiring courage in the face of tyranny. We know this act of war will exact a further toll on those who have already made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. We understand all too well the pain of loss

because we grieve the sacrifices made by our own heroes. TAPS has been blessed to have supporters who have seen the need and reached out to find ways to help TAPS Ukraine, raising funds to purchase and deliver desperately needed food and clothing. In May 2022, we raised the funds for two fully stocked ambulances for TAPS Ukraine, outfitted with state-of-the-art medical equipment that will save lives. We are standing strong with our fellow survivors of TAPS Ukraine as they care for those who are newly bereaved, and we thank all those who contribute to our efforts.

We also understand that for so many across our U.S. military and veteran community, especially surviving families, the news from Ukraine may evoke complicated feelings. Those feelings are valid. You are not alone. And we will always be here for you to listen and help.



To learn more about TAPS Ukraine, visit TAPS.org/Ukraine

PHOTOS: PEXELS.COM/ZOLTANI; TAPS ARCHIVES



Please Say Their Name: The Importance of Honoring and Remembering

Pamela Gabbay, EdD, FT ★ TAPS Advisory Board

My father, Jerry Henry, was in the Army for my entire childhood. We lived all over the United States and in Germany. I really enjoyed being part of the larger military community. After he retired from the Army, he became a long-distance truck driver who drove an 18-wheeler. Late one night, he crashed his big rig on one of his many runs and died instantly. He was only 49 years old. When he died, the pain was unbearable. We didn't have a chance to say goodbye or tell him that we loved him one last time. When my father died, I was 25 years old with a brand new three-week-old baby girl.

I was left reeling from the shock and pain of his death. I had never experienced anyone close to me dying up to that point. I remember trying to figure out how to be a new mom and also a grieving daughter. My father had only met my little baby girl two times, and he would never see her again. She would never know him. The sadness was immense and consuming. In my grief, I put away his photos. I stopped listening to country music, my dad's favorite. I stopped doing anything that would remind me of him. I didn't know anything about grief, and I thought doing this would help my sadness. What I realized later was that I was putting my grief on hold.

Three years after my dad died, I had my second child, a little baby boy. When my son was ten months old, my mom, Shirley Henry, was diagnosed with cancer. She died two weeks later at 51 years old. I was crushed. Once again, I was a grieving daughter trying to navigate the challenges of raising my young family while also figuring out how to live in a world without my parents. When my mom died, I handled my grief so differently and dove into it headlong. I talked about

and shared memories of her. I put photos of my parents all around my home. I told my children stories about my mom and dad, their grandparents.

Through my grief, I was fortunate to have the support of family, good friends, and our military community. I vividly remember being able to tell stories about them and getting that much-needed support. Talking about my parents to people who understood my pain was extremely helpful.

What I didn't know then, but I do know now, is that sharing our stories and remembering our loved ones is an important, crucial part of helping us to cope with our grief. Simply being able to say our loved ones' names out loud, to talk about them so that their memory lives on, is a crucial part of honoring the lives they lived and how much they meant (and still mean) to us.

Why is this so important? Because people die, but our love for them never dies.





After a death, well-meaning friends and family often stop bringing up the person who died. They stop saying their name. They stop sharing memories. Why does this happen? It sometimes happens because people are worried that they will upset us if they bring up the person who died—they don't want to remind us of them and make us sad. What they don't know is that we are already thinking about them constantly. Bringing up our person or saying their name won't cause us to "all of a sudden" start thinking about them. We're already thinking about them. More often than not, saying their name or sharing a memory will be welcomed as they acknowledge that our loved one existed. We never, ever want them to be forgotten.

When someone sits with us in our grief or allows us to tell a story or share a memory, that can tremendously help our healing because we feel supported and less alone.

Family, friends, and society in general often don't know how important this is or how crucial this support is. Sharing special stories and memories is heartening, especially as time goes on.

What are some things that you do to honor and remember your person or people who have died? Do you share their stories? Are there things you do once a year or on an ongoing basis? Perhaps you attend a memorial candle lighting or a walk in their honor, or maybe you volunteer and give back in memory of them. Perhaps you attend a TAPS event. Being able to grieve, honor, and remember in a community like TAPS is invaluable.

After my parents died, I turned to friends, family, and the grief world for help and support. I decided that if I could somehow get through my own pain, I would dedicate the rest of my life to helping others who

were in pain. That was over 25 years ago. Every time I touch the life of someone grieving, I honor and remember my parents, Jerry and Shirley Henry. I am carrying their legacy forward. Thank you for allowing me to say their names and honor and remember them in this special way.

About the Author

Dr. Pamela Gabbay has spent the last 25 years working with bereaved families and overseeing organizations and programs in various leadership roles. She co-founded the Satori Group, which provides education and consultation to the end-of-life, death, and bereavement fields. Dr. Gabbay is also a national trainer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and co-author of Understanding and Supporting Bereaved Children: A Practical Guide for Professionals, a book designed with practical and supportive ways to help grieving children and their families. Previously, she was the Director of the Mourning Star Center for Grieving Children, where she worked extensively with grieving children, teens, and their families. Dr. Gabbay was also an adjunct faculty member in the psychology department of Brandman University, the President of the Southern California Chapter of the Association for Death Education and Counseling, and the Vice President of the Board of Directors of the National Alliance for Grieving Children.



OUR FAMILY REUNION

28TH ANNUAL NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR

Each year, we gather in our nation's capital to honor our loved ones and support each other during the Memorial Day Weekend. This year, we welcomed many survivors to their first TAPS event. Some were only a few short months into their journey, carrying a heavy burden of grief, pain, and uncertainty. Many came in search of connection and hope. Others were unsure what they were seeking; they just knew they needed to be in the company of others walking the journey. We witnessed broken hearts begin to mend as survivors came together to share their precious heroes, open their hearts to comfort fellow survivors, and fill the time spent together with love, laughter, tears, and hope.



“Honestly couldn't think of a better way to spend Memorial Day Weekend!”



“It’s like a family reunion, and I love it.”



“We will cherish the memories for a long time to come.”



“TAPS gave me the tools to become a whole person again.”



“Thank you for one of the most amazing, inspiring, and healing weekends of my life.”

OUR FAMILY REUNION

TAPS GOOD GRIEF CAMP

The Good Grief Camp for young survivors was a time of learning and growing, sharing and connecting, healing and rebuilding. Our staff and volunteers included more than 500 trained military mentors, each paired with a TAPS surviving child or teen. Many of the mentors were active duty service members who volunteered their time to assure our children that they are forever part of the military family, and that the service and sacrifice of their loved ones is never forgotten.



“It was a bonding experience that has brought us closer with a better understanding of our own grief.”



“Our families are blessed to have such awesome people who care.”



“Thank you, TAPS! The smile on my daughter’s face is priceless.”



“I feel so blessed and grateful to have my TAPS Family. Thank you!”



TAPS.ORG



For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

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

Grief knows no boundaries. Challenging moments, when survivors may need extra support can come at any moment. The TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline is answered live — 24/7/365 — with gentle care for all those grieving the death of a military loved one. Our loving network of peer professionals ensures that each Helpline caller has open access to all that TAPS provides. Whether a survivor needs emotional support, connection to resources or programs, or to share what's in their hearts—we always have time, we always answer, and we always care.

**PEER-BASED
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**
TAPS.org/PeerMentors

Survivors helping survivors is the foundation of TAPS. We bring survivors together to find strength and hope through our TAPS Peer Mentor network. Survivors, who are at least 18 months out from their loss, volunteer their time and receive training to become Peer Mentors. Peer Mentors are paired with newly bereaved survivors to help them navigate the aftermath of loss. This program provides comfort to survivors and lets them know that they are not alone. Peer Mentors also lend support at TAPS events throughout the year.

**CASEWORK
ASSISTANCE**
TAPS.org/Casework

TAPS Casework assists surviving military families with a variety of challenges. Our casework team strives diligently to align with partners and third-party resources to address the individual needs of each family, such as pro-bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, information on state and federal benefits, and private social services support. Survivors receive compassionate and responsive support to guide them towards the path of long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

**EDUCATION
SUPPORT SERVICES**
TAPS.org/EDU

Along the grief journey, experiencing a shift in occupational desires or goals is common for military survivors. TAPS Education Services empowers survivors as they seek to enter a new phase of life through pursuance of post-secondary education. We serve as a guide to scholarship information and benefits, align available resources and educational goals, and navigate the best options for financial assistance.

**COMMUNITY-BASED
GRIEF SUPPORT**
TAPS.org/GriefCounseling

Military survivors may benefit from individual grief counseling. Skilled therapists can help those grieving work through difficult questions, changes in relationships, and secondary losses. The right counselor can guide survivors to discover their strengths and develop coping skills that work for them. With the support of our strong community partners, TAPS connects survivors to grief counseling, trauma resources, and local support groups. We perform careful research and compile resources with love and care, locating support for survivors in their community.

**SURVIVOR
CARE TEAM**
TAPS.org/SurvivorCareTeam

At the heart of our survivor support, the TAPS Survivor Care Team compassionately connects survivors with all the resources that TAPS offers. Members of our Survivor Care Team are surviving military family members who have been through extensive professional training on emotional peer-based support, traumatic death, and grief. They are proud to serve as advocates, attentive listeners, and companions for their fellow survivors. Through personalized support, our peer professionals create safe spaces where survivors feel heard and empowered to develop their long-term support systems.

SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT

TAPS.org/Suicide

TAPS has supported thousands of military suicide loss survivors by offering them hope, healing, and renewed opportunities for growth. We understand that suicide grief is different—death by suicide can leave behind a wake of powerful, complicated emotions and questions. Our special programs and resources provide compassionate support for all suicide loss survivors, and safe spaces to honor and grieve their loved ones. Our unique approach helps stabilize survivors and surviving families—guiding survivors towards a path of healthy grieving and growth.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

TAPS.org/Caregiver

TAPS is leader in ensuring that surviving families whose loved one died from illness are recognized, cared for, and aware of all benefits for which they are eligible. We compile relevant legislation, medical studies, expert testimony, literature, and reports to create reference manuals that serve as the foundation of future advocacy work. We critically raise awareness about the effects of toxic exposure, help families navigate the benefits process following a military loss, and provide connections for survivors who have lost their loved ones after having been their caregivers.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

TAPS.org/Empowerment

The pain of loss ushers in hard questions: Why are we here? What is our purpose? TAPS Women's Empowerment programming helps survivors incorporate concepts of identity and spirituality into transformative goal-setting. We provide survivors with tools to inspire confidence that help them move into the lives they have imagined. Through in-person and online events, we bring together a vibrant, compassionate community and supportive sisterhood of surviving women who treasure opportunities to be each other's teachers, confidants, cheerleaders, and friends.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

TAPS.org/YouthPrograms

Though their lives are marked by grief, young TAPS survivors know their lives will also be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, children's grief and loss, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing, such as Good Grief Camps, family campouts, and online programming for parents and guardians of grieving children.

YOUNG ADULTS PROGRAM

TAPS.org/YoungAdults

Designed for surviving military children and siblings ages 18-30, the Young Adults Program helps survivors graduating from the TAPS Good Grief Camp transition into a more mature program. Our dynamic curriculum focuses on five pillars of growth through in-person multi-day all-expense paid experiences, seminar programming, and online group discussions on topics including: personal development, financial stability, communication, career development and service to others. We provide young adult survivors with tools to help them create a well-rounded life full of hope, healing, and growth.

TAPS INSTITUTE FOR HOPE AND HEALING®

TAPS.org/Institute

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® is a national and worldwide leader in training and education for grief and loss professionals, and bereaved individuals and families, both military and civilian. Useful information on grief and bereavement support is available at no cost to all through webinars, webcasts, and other events. The Institute offers programs focused on understanding suicide; understanding children's grief; practical tips for coping with grief; wellness workshops; and creative ways to keep the memories of lost loved ones alive. For professionals, the Institute hosts academic programs instructed by field experts. A wide range of health and social service professional boards offer continuing education credits for these programs.

PUBLICATIONS

TAPS.org/Publications

TAPS has created several proprietary publications to serve the survivor community, offering valuable inspiration and information. In collaboration with subject matter experts, we have designed a series of pocket-size guides – available at no cost to survivors and readily accessible online. These publications provide information on resources and services for grief and bereavement support. Our 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, PhD; the children's book, *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope*; and, the *TAPS Magazine*.



Understanding Your Child's Unique Way of Being in the World

Andy McNeil, MA ★ Senior Advisor, TAPS Youth Programs

How can three children grow up in the same household and be so entirely different? Many factors play a role in shaping who a child is, how they develop, and the person they become. Some of these factors include their genetics (the apple doesn't fall far from the tree), their birth order, household circumstances during formative years (both good and challenging times), and experiences with friends and other family members. It takes all of these things to make us into who we are— why we prefer certain things over others, and how we feel most comfortable being in the world.

Parenting multiple children, who may experience the world differently, has its challenges. How do we determine which behaviors are just “who they are” and which ones need to be redirected or addressed? As we only have so much energy, the answer to this question can help us decide where to use it. Parenting children while also grieving is an extra challenge, and grief certainly takes the lion's share. Here are some suggestions for better understanding how your child feels most comfortable being in the world, and how to best spend our energy parenting them.

Embrace their unique personalities and preferences.

To better understand your children, take a few minutes to consider the unique aspects of each of their personalities. Using a pencil or pen, divide a piece of paper into columns, creating one for each child. Label the top of each column with a different

child's name. Imagine someone has asked you, “Tell me about your child,” and begin writing words that describe each of your children, one at a time. Words can describe anything that captures who they are, such as their personalities, likes, behaviors, or temperaments. Now, remind yourself that your children have unique ways that they feel most comfortable being in the world— and, that is okay. They do not have to be the same, and we do not have to change their personalities. As a matter of fact, we cannot, and if we try to, we will create more conflict than needed. Instead, we can embrace our children for who they are, for whatever that might mean—hyper, quiet, outgoing, reserved, shy, loud, boisterous, overly optimistic, pessimistic, funny, silly, serious, or any other words that might describe them. Notice them, tell them you see them and understand them, love them for who they are, and express that to them regularly.

Set expectations for behavior based on shared household values.

After you have resolved that your children have unique personalities—which are you cannot change—direct your attention toward those things you have the power to change, namely what your household most needs. Values are the virtues that we seek to live our lives by, things like honesty, kindness, hard work, forgiveness, sharing, and patience, to name a few. Shared household values are about how we interact with others and formulate our character. Values are taught, reinforced, and learned. Ask yourself,

“What do I value?” Ask your children, “What do you value?” You can do this exercise together as a family. Talk about what values you all share, and set up a structure for holding everyone in the household accountable to practice these values. In this activity, the focus is not on your children's varying personalities; rather, the focus is on their character.

Many of us find a better flow in our homes by shifting our attention from the things we cannot change in our children to how we model, teach, and hold them and ourselves accountable to live our shared values. This change does not mean that there won't be conflict, but it means that we will focus our energy on those things that ultimately will make a difference for ourselves and our children. Embrace the unique way they feel most comfortable being in the world and celebrate their differences. Hold one another accountable to live the values that will follow your children into their adulthood and *their* children's lives.



PHOTOS: PEXELS.COM/PIXABAY; TAPS ARCHIVES

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

With the summer season comes the opportunity to get out of the house and enjoy the outdoors. Here are a couple of ideas for fun family activities that offer the opportunity to learn about each other and grow closer together.

MY FAVORITE PLACE

PURPOSE

To learn more about what other people in the family like and share that experience.

MATERIALS

- ★ Paper
- ★ Writing or drawing tools (pens, pencils, markers, or crayons)
- ★ The outdoors and a way to get to your favorite places (if you decide to go to each place)



DESCRIPTION

During a time when your family typically gathers, have each person think about their favorite place outside the house. Favorite places may be in the neighborhood, in a city, in nature, on a beach, or at a lake. Have everyone write down their place on paper with pencils, pens, markers, or crayons, and help younger children write down their places. You can also have each person draw or color a picture of their place. Once everyone has written or drawn their favorite place, have each person share about their place and explain why it is their favorite. You will all learn something

about another family member during the sharing.

To add to the experience, plan a day, afternoon, or evening to go to each person's favorite place as a family. Make these outings special and have everyone honor the family member for whom it is their favorite place. You can incorporate other favorites of the special person, like their favorite foods and activities, during your time together as a family. With just a little planning, activities like this build lasting memories for your child(ren) and strengthen your family.



KLINGER, A STORY OF HONOR AND HOPE

Based on *Klinger*, a real horse that serves in the Caission Platoon in Arlington National Cemetery, Betsy Beard's *Klinger* is an endearing story written for TAPS honoring all of America's beloved fallen heroes. The children's book illustrates a young horse dreaming of fame as a racehorse, struggling to achieve his dreams, and then finding fulfillment in honoring fallen heroes and bringing comfort to their families. A journey of loss, grief, and hope, *Klinger* is a wonderful and helpful book for young children experiencing grief over the death of a military loved one. To learn more about *Klinger*, visit taps.org/publications/2010/klinger.



TAPS YOUTH PROGRAMS

TAPS offers support programs for children and teenagers grieving the death of a military family member. Led by caring professionals in child development, grief support, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for military children to be supported in their grief while also experiencing fun, adventure, mentorship, and camaraderie. To explore available TAPS Youth Program events, including Good Grief Camps, Family Campouts, online groups, and online workshops, we invite you to visit taps.org/youthprograms.





TAPS YOUNG ADULTS PROGRAM

For military surviving children and siblings ages 18 to 30, the TAPS Young Adults Program focuses on 5 Pillars of Growth and Healing during your grief journey—personal development, career guidance, communications, financial stability, and service to others. Whether you are a TAPS Good Grief Camp graduate or new to our TAPS family, please know you have a place here.

» GET INVOLVED

YOUNG ADULT ONLINE SESSIONS: Join TAPS Young Adults in our online *Let's Talk Grief* and *Social Hour* sessions, which are safe places where we can connect, learn how others are coping, and strengthen bonds with peers across the country.

YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCES & WORKSHOPS:

Explore TAPS Young Adults Experiences—five-day, four-night immersion projects including community service projects, high-intensity outdoor adventures, and corporate days spent exploring career options. Attend a Young Adults workshop at a TAPS Seminar, where we address the processes of stabilization, grief work, and post-traumatic growth.

ACTIVELY MOVING FORWARD (AMF) APP:

Connect, be heard, and feel understood using this new social network. Get access to supportive services, such as book clubs and workshops designed to expand one's perspective on grief and loss, learning and reading materials, and educational videos to help normalize the feelings associated with loss.

» MEET YOUR PEERS

CHANDLER KEELING: "My name is Chandler Keeling, the TAPS Young Adults Survivor Care Team Associate. I am the surviving son of 1SG Ronald Keeling, who died in 2009. My dad's legacy allowed me to follow my passions educationally and pursue a Master's Degree in Art History, which I earned from the University of Utah in 2020. I joined TAPS in February of 2022 after moving back to my home state of Washington. I am here to provide support, care, and connection to TAPS resources. Whether you have questions, need help finding a grief counselor, or just want to chat about life, I'm here for you!"

JOELLE LEEK: "My name is Joelle Leek, the Coordinator of the TAPS Young Adults Program and surviving daughter of U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Bryce Leek. I grew up in northern New York, where my family was stationed at Fort Drum. After the loss of my father in 2015, I became passionate about helping bereaved military families. I volunteered and fundraised for various military outreach organizations throughout high school and college. I took my passions south and earned a degree in Public Relations at the University of Alabama. After graduating in December of 2021, I joined TAPS in my current position; and as a surviving child, I am thrilled to serve alongside my peers. In my role, I have the opportunity to coordinate in-person and online events for you to connect with your peers!"

"Being in the TAPS Young Adults Program has changed my life exponentially. The people there have helped me grow as a person more than I could've imagined doing on my own. Especially through the past couple of years in a pandemic,



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

I needed them more than ever. To me, the Young Adults Program is all about growth and finding yourself. You find yourself through special connections and grow through the experiences and opportunities TAPS provides. I couldn't be more grateful than I am for them." – *Surviving Son, 20*

"TAPS is something I didn't want to exist. I didn't want anyone else to know this pain. But in the Young Adults Program, I not only found others like me who were missing someone they loved and were loved by, but also others trying to figure out the question of 'what now?' It is comforting in a way I cannot describe. I can't imagine trying to do life without them." – *Surviving Daughter, 20*

"I joined TAPS in 2022, which was two years after my father passed of combat-related injury/illness. I've been on two trips so far, Boston and Charleston. On the Boston trip - in the context of, 'If you don't like football, why did you come to the Patriots' stadium?' - someone said to me, "Why are you here?" And I ask myself that a lot, not only in the context of within TAPS, but within my life: Why am I here? What am I trying to do? Why do I keep going?"

The answer I like most is just that I love connection. I remember Josh Gates, creator of **Expedition Truth** and **Destination Truth**, sharing something similar on the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro. On New Year's Eve, Gates said that the connection of drinking from a smuggled champagne bottle motivated him. Seeing all of these people (from Ireland, Germany, America, and India) who met upon this mountain celebrating New Year's together, he realized that people worldwide were doing the same thing. People in the middle of the desert, beneath the ocean in submarines, and researchers in the Antarctic, were connecting all for this single shared celebration. He wanted to be in all those vastly different places with all those vastly different people, connecting with them over something—anything—shared.

I guess that's a lot of what it is for me, too— this connection. It's the travel, the ease of friendship among this single shared thing "even if it is something as ugly or as lonely as death", and the simplicity and silent understanding of a willingness to change, learn, meet new people, and welcome their blossoming ideas. It's to hate what happened to you, and learn that it's okay to do so. It's to say 'God, I'm tired!' and have 13 other voices mumble 'Yeah, me too!' in unison. It's simple, endless, and something weirdly irreplaceable. I realized that my group members had taken (even without my knowledge) their places in my heart when I saw Lydia at the airport, and she hugged me. At first it didn't seem reasonable, as I'd seen her just hours before, but the joy I felt shook all the strangeness from it. Something about 'goodbye' being impermanent, changing itself to 'see you later' like my family prefers to say, occurred to me later. So thanks to Joelle, Chandler (who carefully plucked me from my shell), and all of TAPS for giving me this connection." – *Surviving Daughter, 20*



HEALGRIEF.ORG



TAPS.ORG/
YOUNGADULTS



Grief is a Path Best Shared

Perry Monroe ★ Surviving Father of U.S. Army Sergeant Christopher Taylor Monroe

We are all different in how our grief journeys unfold; and for me, my turning point came 13 years after the death of my son, U.S. Army Sergeant Christopher Taylor Monroe. For many years, I had held my emotions inside, with no one knowing of the losses I had suffered. Seeing how grief had affected those around me, I did my best to be the solid rock holding things together for everyone else. As a father, I wanted to be my family's anchor in the face of all hardship.

When I finally opened up to the reality of my grief, I found my way home. One of the many things I have learned along my journey is that time doesn't heal all wounds. If anything, it can make the pain worse. While being honest with our emotions can unlock a new strength in us, empowering us to endure what we once thought was impossible.

Accepting Support Through the TAPS Men's Program

After a special friend introduced me to TAPS, my grief journey reached a turning point. At the time, I still had not outwardly shown my grief, but I was ready to explore the TAPS website to see what grief support they offered for men like myself. I found an upcoming Men's Retreat in Montana, knew I needed to be there, and was over the moon with excitement registering for the trip.

When the retreat began, we all sat around in a big circle. Our TAPS leaders asked us to say who we were, our loved ones' names, and their dates of birth. Over the years, I had always given the day Chris died— it had never occurred to me to think of the day he was born. I shared the story of the morning he was born, and cried for the first time since his funeral. During this time, I learned about the dash—the life our loved ones lived from the day they were born to the day they died—and I realized how easily we forget what was truly important about our loved ones.

Discovering Strength in Honoring My Emotions

Although I had built a wall to keep all of my emotions inside, I could feel it beginning to form cracks. I soon discovered that it was ok to laugh, and even cry. The next day, we went on a horseback ride to a mountain lake. My ride was a mule named Sally who was sure-footed, making her way up the mountain to the lake. When we arrived, our leaders told us to find a comfortable place and spend some time writing. We were to write ourselves a letter or a poem, or we could write about this experience. I found a place to sit, so I took out my journal and thought for a moment, "I am here. I am really here." Halfway through my writing, I realized that I was writing to my son Chris, telling him how he would like it here as if he was there with me.

As the emotions flooded over me, the wall that I had built over the years came crashing down. I didn't just feel my son's death, but also the deaths of my brothers who I had lost while serving in the Marines. It was like they were all there comforting me as I finally faced my emotions. That was the first time I had ever written something about my grief, but I soon discovered it would not be my last. That was day one of my grief journey for me, as if all the death I had experienced throughout my life had just happened. I had been alone with my grief in the past, but now I came to understand that I was not alone. There are other men like me. That retreat had given me the strength to say my loved ones' names and tell their stories that I had kept hidden all the years before.

Sharing My Grief

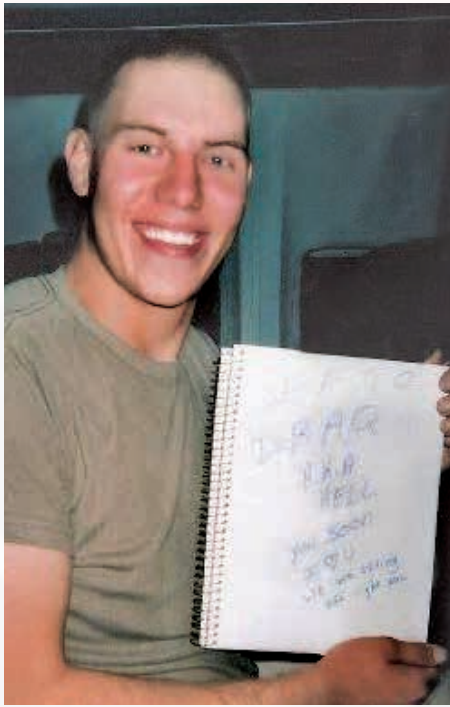
The following year I found out a TAPS Regional Seminar would be at Fort Hood, not far from where I lived. After I registered, I learned that there would be a TAPS Peer Mentor training during the seminar.

My friend who originally introduced me to TAPS was a fellow Marine, and one thing about Marines is that we leave no one behind. And so, I decided I wanted to become a Peer Mentor and help in any way I could. Being a Peer Mentor was similar to when I was in the Marines looking out for my men. With what I have experienced, I knew that others like myself needed a voice of support, and I wanted to help be that for them. As time went on, I began helping lead my local TAPS Care Group.

Exploring My Grief Through Writing

While I was sitting, drinking my coffee one morning, something entered my mind. I went to my computer and wrote for about 15 minutes—it was the first thing I had written since that day on the mountain in Montana. Now I was never a writer, but this felt so natural. Writing has since become my escape, a way of talking to myself and pondering the many thoughts that cross my mind related to my grief journey.

Come, walk with me for a while. Let us walk this path together, taking it at our own pace and distance. It is a path best shared, though we think we walk it alone. For all we may have been or had before, it is to express what we cannot conceal. By its nature, it is a path where society can not intrude. The sky overhead will clear in time, changing from this dark gray oppression. We can pause if you like—time does not bind us. Take my hand, for I will not lead nor will I follow, but join you at your side. The path will rise and fall as it meanders along. Let it rain when it comes unconfined. Let it rain, for it is an expression of love. It is love that has set us on this path. If it pains you, we can stop and rest. In resting, we reflect on the past, taking strength to renew our journey together. I cannot take your burden away, but I can share that burden. All I ask is for you to come, walk with me for a while.



U.S. Army Sergeant Christopher Taylor Monroe

"I had been alone with my grief in the past, but now I came to understand that I was not alone." Perry Monroe



TAPS MEN'S PROGRAM

TAPS understands that most men need other men to help pave the way for them to grieve. Whether you are a surviving brother, father, battle buddy, adult child, or spouse, you have a home at TAPS.

So what is it about the TAPS Men's Program that bonds us to each other? We are men who lost loved ones who served this great country. We lean on each other to share the experience, strength, and hope that we each have inside us— no matter how far out we are from our loss. We grow stronger by knowing we can count on each other to be the energy we are all sometimes lacking from time to time. We come together because of our shared grief, and this is the common bond that keeps us coming back for more kinship.

» SEMINAR PROGRAMMING

Survivor seminars provide opportunities to connect with other men throughout a weekend of hope and healing with military survivors. We build community with one another in casual settings like our “Men's Only Breakfasts” and Men's Share Groups. Together, we also participate in interactive workshops where we can discuss some of the more traditional ways men reveal their unique grief.

» ONLINE PROGRAMMING

Planned by men, led by men, and only for men, the Men's Online Group is a solid, supportive space where TAPS men can handle their grief in their way.

The group is for all surviving men at any point in their grief journeys. Men from our Survivor Care Team use various session formats to keep the experience interesting, diverse, and tailored to the attendees' preferences.

» RETREATS AND OUTDOORS

Through retreats and outdoor experiences, small groups of survivors who share similar losses come together over several days from across the nation to build a further sense of community. Together, we step away from the daily grind, step outside our comfort zone, enjoy incredible opportunities in unique locations, honor our loved ones, and connect with other men who understand.



“My trip to West Creek Ranch on the Montana Men’s Retreat was such a stepping stone to learning how to work through the grieving process of losing my daughter. I’m beyond blessed, and so honored I was able to attend this event.”

The leaders, Don, Jon, and Doug, were so awesome and helped me in so many ways. I attended group meetings, and took part in horseback riding, archery, hiking, and fly fishing—none of which I would ever have done without the support of the TAPS leaders and ranch staff, and feeling completely comfortable with them. Spending a week with other men grieving the loss of children made me feel that I am not alone and that my thoughts and feelings are normal and valid.

Words will never describe how I truly feel about my time at West Creek Ranch. THANK YOU feels not appropriate enough; please know how much I wholeheartedly love TAPS, the opportunity I received, and the love and support I felt from the TAPS leaders and everyone at West Creek Ranch. I will carry this experience in my heart always.”

Stephen Burnah ★ Surviving Father of U.S. Army Private Nicole Ann Burnham

“The TAPS Montana Men’s Retreat at West Creek Ranch was a life-changing experience that gave me hope to expect better things in the future. It went above and beyond my expectations on how much help something like this could offer. I met and bonded with 17 other men who had lost loved ones just like me, and these men are now my support system and friends. TAPS and West Creek Ranch staff were wonderful, patient, and understanding of our pain and journey. The facilitators were knowledgeable and showed a level of understanding and empathy. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for this opportunity to bond with 17 of the most caring men that I know.”

Rad Sellner ★ Surviving Father of U.S. Army Private Karl Jacob Sellner



TAPS.ORG/MEN

Join us by scanning the QR code above to search TAPS Men’s Programs we offer throughout the year. We welcome you!

“About two weeks after losing my son, I received a phone call from Rich Cliff with TAPS inviting me to join a Men’s call. We talked on the phone for an hour as I asked him questions. He, too, had the dreaded experience of having to go to the airport and receive his son home in a casket. I had just done that a few days before, and this man was the ONLY person around me who “got it.” He understood what I was going through when nobody else had up to that point.”

Fast forward to month after month of dialing into TAPS Men’s calls and forming up alongside my band of brothers—brothers new and old to this journey. They came from all different states and time zones. They had sons and daughters, brothers, sisters, moms, dads, etc., that had perished while serving this great country. The commonality amongst us all was the grief that we shared. Real men know how to put down their armor and shield and just cry with other men. What I saw on the Men’s call was not men showing stubborn machoness that I was used to, but brokenness that was understood and empathized by all that portrayed it. Some were doing better than others, not just based on time but based on their individual journeys. I have seen some men ten years out from their loss break at their first word, unable to talk; and others six months from their loss carry on a full conversation about how post-traumatic healing has been taking place in their lives.”

Paul Gilson ★ Surviving Step-Father of U.S. Navy Electronics Technician Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Halpert



UPCOMING » IN-PERSON

SEMINARS AND GOOD GRIEF CAMPS - BE WITH YOUR TAPS FAMILY

» TAPS.org/Seminars

No matter where you are in your grief journey, support and connection await you at a TAPS seminar. Both regional and national seminars are inclusive, discussion-based events that include workshops for understanding and processing grief and small-group sharing sessions where you can connect with your peers. At TAPS Good Grief Camps, which occur during seminars, young survivors can openly talk about and express their grief, learn coping skills, and develop connections with peers and Military Mentors.

JULY 8-10

Denver, Colorado

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP

AUGUST 26-28

San Antonio, Texas

SOUTHERN REGIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP

OCTOBER 7-9

Dallas, Texas

14TH ANNUAL NATIONAL MILITARY SUICIDE SURVIVOR SEMINAR AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP

NOVEMBER 18-20

Los Angeles, California

WESTERN REGIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP

SURVIVOR PROGRAMS

» TAPS.org/Events

Join TAPS during programs that will help you feel companioned as you grieve, supported as you rebuild, and united with other survivors as we choose to hope. Through a wide variety of experiences, we find opportunities to create healthy habits, seek hope, and connect with nature as we carry our loved ones with us.



SEPTEMBER 19-23

Maumee, Ohio

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT

TAPS.ORG/SUMMIT/2022/EMPOWERMENT

**OCTOBER 30 -
NOVEMBER 4**

Sedona, Arizona

**SEDONA WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT RETREAT**

TAPS.ORG/RETREATS/2022/SEDONA/FALL

JANUARY 2023

Mendoza, Argentina

ACONCAGUA EXPEDITION

TAPS.ORG/EXPEDITIONS/2023/ACONCAGUA

TAPS EVENTS

FAMILY CAMPS

» TAPS.org/YouthPrograms
youthprograms@taps.org

Join TAPS Youth Programs this fall for some fun among peers and family, in a traditional camp setting, to forage and strengthen relationships. Engaging in peer and family groups, participants of all ages explore outdoor activities like ziplining, water sports, low and high ropes challenges, and campfire fun, all while creating special opportunities for family bonding.

SEPTEMBER 9-12
Bolivar, Tennessee

TENNESSEE FAMILY CAMP
TAPS.ORG/YOUTH/2022/TENNESSEE

SEPTEMBER 23-26
Newbury, Ohio

OHIO FAMILY CAMP
EMAIL: YOUTHPROGRAMS@TAPS.ORG

NOVEMBER 3-7
Julian, California

CALIFORNIA FAMILY CAMP
TAPS.ORG/YOUTH/2022/CALIFORNIA



TEAM TAPS

» TAPS.org/TeamTaps
teamtaps@taps.org

Join Team TAPS as we honor our fallen heroes through running, walking, swimming, biking, and many other competitive events. Hundreds of people every year, from experienced runners to those new to the sport, participate in events throughout the country to remember and honor our fallen service members and raise funds to help support the TAPS mission.

OCTOBER 9
Washington, D.C.

ARMY TEN-MILER

OCTOBER 30
Arlington, Virginia

**MARINE CORPS MARATHON,
50K AND 10K**



» Visit TAPS.org/Events for more information about upcoming events.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 800.959.TAPS(8277).

TAPS EVENTS CALENDAR

ONLINE EVENTS



★ TAPS.org/OnlineCommunity
★ online@taps.org

TAPS ONLINE COMMUNITY

The TAPS Online Community is here for you—wherever you are in your grief journey, the country, or the world. The recently updated TAPS Online Community allows you to explore all of our online programs—including online groups and workshops—in one place. Through online sessions, connect with, learn from, and be inspired by fellow survivors. Finding your peers within the TAPS family has become easier than ever! New programs and many opportunities for rich engagement await you.



ONLINE GROUPS

Count on Connections: Online groups are peer-led, facilitated sessions that bring together survivors with similar experiences, where there's never pressure to share but always an opportunity. We value the importance of knowing that there are “places” we can show up and feel supported by others of shared loss and experience. And, you can decide to connect with us each week or whenever it is convenient or compelling. Our TAPS Family will always welcome you.

WORKSHOPS AND SERIES

Learn Together: Workshops and online series provide the opportunity for us to learn together, have shared experiences, and create community—all of which can help normalize our grief and contribute to healing along the way. Our current offerings meet weekly or monthly, including theatre labs for adults and families and online series in grief leadership for adults and young adults.

RECURRING ONLINE GROUPS

BY RELATIONSHIP

- ★ Parents
- ★ Parents of Suicide Loss
- ★ Siblings
- ★ Spouses/Partners/Fiancés/
Fiancees/Significant Others

BY CAUSE OF DEATH

- ★ Accident Loss
- ★ Combat Loss
- ★ Illness Loss
- ★ Suicide Loss

BY PEER GROUP

- ★ Spanish Speaking
- ★ Parenting Grieving Children
- ★ Men's Chat
- ★ Moms Mentoring Moms
- ★ Women's Circle
- ★ Young Adults Social Hour
- ★ All Survivors Welcome
- ★ Peer Mentors



TAPS INSTITUTE FOR HOPE AND HEALING®

TAPS.org/Institute ★ institute@taps.org

Empower yourself through grief, resilience, and wellness education at the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®, where practical information on coping with loss is accessible to all. At the Institute, TAPS and the Hospice Foundation of America have teamed up to provide workshops, seminars, panel discussions, and more to train professionals and help individuals and families thrive after loss. Visit the Institute to access its event calendar, register for upcoming live webinars, and watch archived webinars online today.

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TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

3033 Wilson Boulevard, Third Floor
Arlington, VA 22201

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800-959-TAPS (8277) ★ TAPS.org

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



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



PHOTO: TAPSAC

*"People touch our lives if only for a moment,
And yet we're not the same from that moment on,
The time is not important, The moment is forever. – Fern Bork*