

# TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

# T \* A \* P \* S



VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 3





TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS, INC.

Remember the *Love*  
Celebrate the *Life*  
★ Share the *Journey* ★



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

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Father and son team, Richard and Aaron Stanley, run in memory of America's fallen heroes in the Marine Corps Marathon, while raising funds and awareness for TAPS.

# ABOUT TAPS

*TAPS Magazine is dedicated to the brave men and women who paid the ultimate price for freedom. The quarterly magazine is written by and for surviving family members and friends. It is our hope that you will find comfort and connection in these pages as you continue your journey of grief.*

## Who We Are

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

## What We Do

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

## T\*A\*P\*S

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

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

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

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

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

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

**CARES** about and supports all survivors including spouses, significant others, children, parents, siblings, friends and co-workers.

Call us for more information at 1-800-959-TAPS (8277) or visit us at [www.TAPS.org](http://www.TAPS.org).

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## VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 3

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

To submit an article, request permission to reprint a previously published article, or subscribe to TAPS Magazine, please email [info@taps.org](mailto:info@taps.org).

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**“When I am around the military - the Honor Guard, the families, the kids, the parents, the ones who are the thin line between life and death for freedom, the ones who make our lives worth living - I have hope for the human spirit.”**



*By Ben Stein, The Real Stars  
(The American Spectator Online 6/6/2005)*



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

**WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!  
800-959-TAPS**





# Double Loss

By Carolyn Cosmo

Ami Neiberger-Miller's brother was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq – a shock that compounded her loss. "Both of my in-laws had cancer and passed away a few years ago, and my experience with their deaths was dramatically different from my brother's death in Iraq to an IED [improvised explosive device].

A sudden military loss can be overwhelming," said Neiberger-Miller, who works as public affairs director for TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors), a D.C. nonprofit that supports people dealing with the death of someone serving in the military.

Many experts now agree with what grieving family members such as Neiberger-Miller have been saying for years: Dealing with violent, unexpected death is different. This type of loss holds true for death by car accident, homicide, or suicide as well as for being killed in a war or natural disaster.

Violent loss can increase the risk of debilitating reactions and poor health among survivors, and it can trigger intense grief often believed to be a type of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), although many experts now think this intense grief is actually its own

separate syndrome - which, for lack of a better name, is labeled "complicated" or "traumatic" grief.

"Complicated grief is a unique entity that seems to stand by itself," Yuval Neria told *The Washington Diplomat*. Neria is a Columbia University professor and director of the Trauma and PTSD Program at the New York State Psychiatric Institute who recently surveyed New York City survivors of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to see how the trauma affected their overall health.

In research published in 2006, Neria and 10 colleagues found a high rate of health problems in 9/11 survivors a year after the World Trade Center Twin Towers went down. Of nearly 1,000 Manhattan medical patients surveyed, more than a fourth had lost someone in the attack. These survivors were twice as likely to have a mental health disorder compared to other patients. Nearly 30 percent had depression, 17 percent had PTSD, and almost 20 percent had chronic anxiety. In addition, physical health problems were three times more common, with many survivors reporting intense pain and lost workdays due to health issues.

The distinctive range of these New Yorkers' symptoms could help to develop the concept of "complicated grief," Neria's paper said. "Our research suggests that special attention should be paid to patients who have experienced [traumatic] loss, since early detection and treatment may help to prevent long-term, chronic disease and higher mortality rates," he said.

Neria and other researchers presented their new take on trauma in Washington on March 30, 2008 at a symposium on PTSD and other disorders. The symposium was sponsored in part by NARSAD (National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression), the world's leading charity dedicated to funding mental health research.

PTSD is an extreme brain response to a horrible experience. It can show up in obsessive thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, and intense distress at reminders of the trauma. Sufferers may feel numb or suicidal, withdraw from society, or have angry outbursts.

Whether or not trauma triggers PTSD depends on many factors,





## Researchers Examine Impact of Trauma on Survivor Health

according to researchers at the symposium. These can include a person's genetic makeup, childhood experiences, personality, coping skills, belief systems, amount of lifetime exposure to trauma (it adds up), social support, and how much control a person thinks he or she has over life in general. But a key factor in PTSD is the nature of the trauma itself - how long, how much, and how bad it was.

Neria opened his address at the symposium with a personal story to explain this trauma theory. An Israeli veteran of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Neria was part of a tank company of 70 soldiers, almost all of whom died in the first day of battle. When Neria became a health researcher, he wanted to examine soldier vulnerability and resilience. He discovered that about 14 percent of Yom Kippur soldiers had PTSD, but the rate of PTSD stood at 25 percent among Israeli soldiers who had been taken as prisoners of war.

Thus the severity of trauma mattered, a notion that's been reinforced by studies of other conflicts: In World War II, POWs had a 50 percent PTSD rate, and in the Korean War, POWs had

a staggering 80 percent PTSD rate, reflecting the severe length and amount of abuse in their captivity.

But what factors besides the actual trauma itself play a part in mental health disorders? In a 2005 study of civilian survivors of the Balkan wars in the former Yugoslavia, Dr. Metin Basoglu of King's College London found that 33 percent of these survivors suffered from PTSD and 10 percent from depression. Of the factors associated with these disorders, bitterness, a sense of injustice, safety and loss of control over life appeared to be most important.

Similarly, Neria told the recent Washington symposium about a survey of Vietnam War veterans, which found that PTSD was much more prevalent among vets who felt the war had a negative impact on their lives as opposed to those who had an overall more positive appraisal of the war (70 percent compared to 18 percent).

More recently, PTSD is re-emerging as a major health issue among Iraqi war veterans, especially in light of investigations that have uncovered high suicide rates among vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In fact, nearly 20 percent of military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan - 300,000 in all - report symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder or major depression, yet only slightly more than half have sought treatment, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

Dr. Robert Ursano, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the Uniformed Services University, who spoke at the Washington mental health symposium, said that many service members don't seek professional help to avoid the stigma of looking "weak" or because they want to solve the problem on their own. "We have effective treatments," Ursano emphasized, citing many promising new therapeutics in development through NARSAD research.

As a growing number of studies around the world indicate, addressing PTSD and its cousin, complicated grief, is critical not only to lessen the immediate pain of a sudden trauma or loss, but also to prevent long-term health problems that would make an already tragic situation even worse. ★



# Military Children and Grief

After the flag is folded, and after the last echoing notes of Taps have sounded on the bugle, the overwhelming grief of losing a parent in military service comes to rest squarely on shoulders too small, too fragile, too young, and too inexperienced to bear the burden alone. Tucked away from the public spotlight, the grief following a military death continues for months and years: horrendous, traumatic, and complicated by a number of factors. Recognizing how different a military death is for the surviving children is an important step in helping them cope with grief.

## Absence of the Deployed Parent

During a long deployment, a child may feel responsible for his siblings or remaining parent. "Be good until I get home and don't give mom a hard time." If the father doesn't return, the child often feels that the mandate remains in effect forever. Acting "like a kid" again seems like a betrayal of dad's trust.

Another aspect of deployment is that the families become accustomed to their loved ones being gone for long periods of time. This makes it harder, especially for a younger child, to realize or acknowledge that his parent is gone forever this time.

## Death Notification

The death notification of an active duty member of the military can be highly traumatic. A child raised on a military base knows the significance of a government vehicle coming to his house, with a chaplain and a notifying officer both

in Class A Dress uniform. One young child said, "Daddy promised that the Chaplain would not knock on our front door. When Mommy saw the car pull up into the driveway, she knew right away what had happened. So she walked out into the driveway to receive the terrible news. She made sure that Daddy kept his promise."

## Condition of the Loved One's Remains

Because of the nature of combat injuries or training accidents resulting in death, the mortal remains of the deceased may not be viewable. Children are often haunted by images of what may have happened to their loved one. In addition, the family will have unanswerable questions regarding what was left of the body. And, lastly, the children are prevented from verifying the identification of their parent for themselves, or saying a final goodbye by either sight or touch.

## Military Funerals

The military does a wonderful job of memorializing those who die in service to this nation. But an added complication of a military death in a combat zone is the lengthy process of recovering and transporting the body home before the actual burial can take place. The family has no control over this process and receives very little information as to an expected time frame. This process prolongs the family's uncertainty and disbelief.

Meanwhile, the family must plan a funeral service in the soldier's hometown, and possibly a second service, if the

deceased is to be buried in a national cemetery such as Arlington National Cemetery. Travel arrangements must be made. And all this time, the children really have no functioning parent, since one has died and the other is consumed by grief and the pressure to complete the arrangements for the disposition of the spouse's mortal remains.

These ceremonial observances are often repeated when the deployed unit of the deceased service member returns to America. The family is invited to attend yet another memorial service, sometimes many months after their loved one has been buried.

## Media Attention and Political Protesters

Because of the public nature of a combat death and the political nature of war, some families have been subjected to vindictive protests at their loved one's funeral and interment. Picketers have displayed extreme insensitivity by shouting at the bereaved family and waving signs telling the children and surviving spouse that God hates their country in general, and their loved one in particular. This tactless behavior is forced on the grieving family at a time when they are least able to cope with the additional trauma.

After the funeral, the family is chronically faced with images that can intensify their grief. Newscasts are filled with reports of death and descriptions of destruction. In an ongoing war, scenes from the combat zone are aired repeatedly. Children have to endure extensive media coverage, not only of their loved one's death, but also of subsequent deaths as they occur.





By Betsy Beard with Lt. Col. Judith Mathewson, Tina Saari, and Heather Campagna. Excerpted from the Military Children and Grief chapter of Hospice Foundation of America's 2008 book *Living With Grief: Children and Adolescents*.

### Isolation from Peers within the Military Community

Children who have been raised on a military base are surrounded by other children whose parents are at equal risk for death and injury. Other children tend to avoid the bereaved child because they fear that their own parent may die. Mirroring the adults around them, they don't want to talk to the bereaved child.

A bereaved military child feels especially isolated when his deceased parent's unit finally returns home from a combat deployment. The child bears the pain of watching the joyful homecoming ceremonies and reunions of their peers with parents that are returning home alive and well. This painful and difficult event increases the feeling that the child is alone on his grief journey.

### Isolation from the Military Community

Families that have been struck by the tragic loss of a parent serving on active duty are required to move off base within one year of the death. This is a drastic change for children who have known nothing other than the military lifestyle and the sense of pride and community that comes with it. This secondary loss greatly impacts the military child. The stress of adapting to a new school situation and a new neighborhood adds to the stress of the grieving process.

### Civilian Reactions to Military Death

Military children have pointed out that the civilian children in their schools don't

understand the military culture, and will torment them about not having a dad or mom. One twelve year old told of being taunted by another boy in his class who said, "If your dad had done his job right, he wouldn't be dead." The bereaved boy was humiliated and deeply hurt. At school, he had no one to turn to. And he didn't want to worry his mother, who was already struggling as the sole surviving parent in the family.

### Tension Between Pride in Service and the Emotions of Grief

There exists for most military survivors a strange dichotomy between the devastating negative emotions of grief and the feeling of immense pride in the accomplishments of the loved one. It is uncomfortable to speak of the pride outside of the military context because many civilians can't identify with it or mistake it for a lack of sorrow.

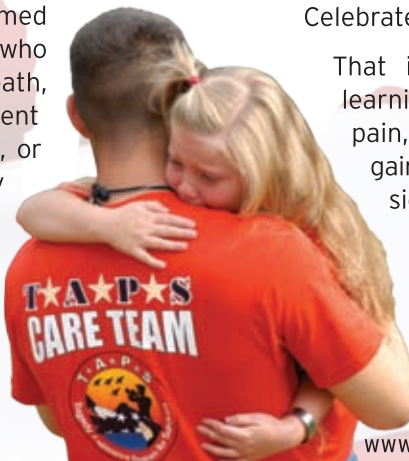
In spite of the pride, all the other usual emotions for grief are in evidence. Children often express guilt that they didn't write enough letters while their parent was deployed, and fear that they were not behaving well while mom or dad was off at war. Anger can be aimed at the terrorists who caused the death, the government and its officials, or even the military itself that sent their mom or dad to war.

### Conclusion

There is much that can be learned from our American military culture, including honoring the lives that were lived and taking pride in their accomplishments. Being a military family requires special commitment and dedication. The military death requires a special type of grieving, allowing room for the customs and courtesies of the branch of service, the military honors, the assignment of a Casualty Assistance Officer, and the certainty of relocation at some point.

TAPS is a ready resource for families struggling with the death of a military service member. A significant part of the TAPS mission is to minister to the mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of children who are a part of the military family and have suffered the traumatic death of a parent. The children of the men and women who have died in service to our country are proud of their family member's military service. They are among the most worthy recipients of our help as they face the fears and struggles that may lie ahead for years to come. At TAPS, we listen to their stories and help them as they strive to "Remember the love, Celebrate the life, Share the journey"

That is the message of TAPS - learning that we can survive the pain, cherish the memories, and gain strength from walking side by side down this painful journey of grief, alongside those who understand and care. ★





# One year ago... ♦ ♦ ♦

Can you remember what happened one year ago, one year ago on this very day? If you can, I imagine something wonderful or terrible took place. Think back, where were you on February 23, 2007? Do you remember? I will never forget that day. I will never forget the many days that followed. What took place was terrible. But I have a new promise. Join me in this new promise for one year from today.

I will remember today, because:

- ★ I woke and thanked God for every blessing first.
- ★ I could not see, for I am blind, but I know how beautiful the world, God made it.
- ★ I could not hear, for I am deaf, but I know the song of love is everywhere, for God sings it.
- ★ I could not feel, for I have lost my hands, but I know God is the Creator.
- ★ I could not walk, for I have lost my legs, but I know around every corner is another blessing.
- ★ My boys are safe, for they were well trained and God is looking out for them.
- ★ My wife is safe, for she is surrounded with my love and God's.
- ★ My country is safe, for she is protected by my sons and their band of brothers.

How could I ever forget such a glorious day?

How can any of us ever forget each life that has been freely given to protect us all?

On this day, God received into his protection, my son, SSG Joshua Hager. Everyday, someone remembers the pain of one year ago. Let us remember every day, the blessings of this day.

Going back in time... On April 17, 2004 my wife Esther ended her personal struggle with breast cancer. She survived more than twenty-three years after the first occurrence and taught me so many times over the years what grace, joy, and peace look like in real life. Having so many years to consider the possible end of life gives opportunity for conversations most couples never imagine. Esther always asked that I take care of myself first, and then said, "I will send you someone. I never want you to be alone."

Esther kept her promise to send me a wonderful partner. Her name is Wendy. Wendy is twenty-two years my junior. She is the love of my life and knows as much about my sons and my life with Esther as anyone could. I am blessed to have Wendy in my life.

My two boys, my two men, were in their finest dress uniforms when Wendy and I married in May of 2006. It was a wonderful time with family and friends. Aaron wore his USCG Ensign's blues and Joshua wore the proud stripes of an Army Sergeant, with his Ranger tab on the shoulder. I was so very proud of them both.

Four months later, in September, the four of us reunited in Colorado Springs, CO to say good-bye to Josh as he prepared to deploy from Ft.

Carson to Iraq. Josh had searched for a transfer from his 6th Ranger Training Battalion to a group being sent to fight. He got his transfer and he was selected to be Platoon Sergeant for the battalion colonel's scout platoon. Josh was going into the fire in Anbar Province, Iraq.

Five months later, we lost Josh on February 22, 2007. I was sitting at a stoplight when Heather, Josh's wife, called me. I saw her name on the screen and said, "Hi, how you doing?" All I could hear were the tears, and I knew the worst had happened. Josh was gone. As every family member in the TAPS family knows, the call that comes and communicates our soldier is gone, that call is never forgotten and lives forever in our ears. I could not drive, nor could I sit in the middle of the street. Somehow I did drive home and collapsed at the bottom of the stairs to our condo. Wendy wondered why I didn't come in through the garage. Then she saw my face and knew the awful news. We fell together on the floor and held each other for what seemed like hours. But I had calls to make and those calls included my parents and brother, friends and extended family.

The TAPS family is far too familiar with the experiences of the following weeks and months. Wendy and I traveled across the country to be in Colorado for services. We returned to Florida and then back again to Colorado to share some time with Heather and Bayley, my grandson. Then we headed to Texas. The next chapter in difficult times was just beginning.





By Kris Hager, Surviving father of US Army SSG Joshua Hager, killed in action in Ramadi, Iraq on February 23, 2007



On November 15th my mom was set for hip replacement surgery. Mom is 91 years old, does not look a day over 75, and had almost no experience with being restricted from movement. My dad, Zack, was 86 and in far worse health than any of us knew. After Mom's surgery we drove Dad to another hospital emergency room. His prostate cancer had metastasized to his spine. Complications from Alzheimer's made treatment and diagnosis more difficult than normal. We moved Dad into the hospital and he never made it back home. Mom recovered fully from her surgery and then had to deal with her husband's decline. I had experience, so I took the lead in dealing with Dad. Hospice took control of his daily care and he passed away April 12. The memorial service was on April 17, four years after Esther had died. Strange coincidence of dates.

In the intervening months, Wendy and I lived the most nomadic and challenging life we could imagine. I had closed my business in Florida the day before Josh was killed. We had filed for bankruptcy and kept thinking we could land somewhere and start over. Our somewhere moved from Florida to Colorado to Louisiana to Colorado and to Texas. I was lost, depressed, and broken. I was dragging my wife from town to town and our hearts were breaking. At one point of despair Wendy told me I wanted to be sad more than I wanted to love her. She was emotional at the time and she was right. I did not know how to heal.

Wendy started feeling ill early this year. She had abdominal pain and difficulty eating and sleeping. She was emotionally unstable, and I was not making life easier. We finally landed in Denver and tried one more time to find a place to live and get a job. Wendy interviewed for a position with PetSmart. I found a job as a shop foreman, and we thought things might begin to work out. But PetSmart never called and Wendy began to hurt more. Shortly thereafter, we went to a local hospital emergency room. Wendy was in terrible pain and we really feared she might have a cyst... or worse.

The nurse looked at Wendy and said, "Wow, when are you due?"

We said, "No way!"

In a year of loss, pain, depression, and fear we had somehow managed the miracle of new life. The one time we had let ourselves enjoy each other physically was the weekend of February 23, the one-year anniversary of losing Josh. It turns out that nine months after February 23 will be Thanksgiving Day.

This story is still being written, but let me say for now that in the midst of sorrow we have been given joy. God gives, and gives again. They tell us a little boy will join our family this fall. I am shocked and so excited I can barely stand myself.

I know Josh is just laughing his butt off. Aaron is somewhere off the Florida coast on his USCG Cutter. He remains, as do all service men and women, in harms way. And meanwhile, we see and feel the movement of a new life.

Healing from loss comes in time and in many forms. One of the key quotes I use each day is from *The Course in Miracles* by Helen Schucman. "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the Peace of God."

I know that the very real souls of Esther, Josh, and Zack are together watching over the newest family soul of our son-to-be. We live each day with a coin that grows in size... a coin that has Joy on one side and Sorrow on the other. I know that Joy and Sorrow share our lives and come together for our experience. I do not know why this is. But I am comforted to know that the life we are bringing into the world will share a family history rich with grace, bravery, service, and most of all, love. As he grows, God has seen fit to bring my healing along faster. That is a good thing. Our Thanksgiving Day son is a great thing. ✪

*I watched a bird fly in a breeze,  
That other birds would not.  
And with each beat of fighting wings,  
I wondered why he fought?  
Fought so hard against a wind,  
That kept him so he must begin,  
From where he'd just begun.  
Then the words came back to me,  
That faith, though small as  
a mustard seed,  
Will lead us safely home.*



# I Knew I Was Picking the Right

By Sarah Greene

Surviving wife of Lt Col David S. Greene, USMC, a cobra helicopter pilot who was killed in action in Iraq on July 28, 2004 while providing air support to a ground unit under attack.

At lunch on the first day of the Survivor Weekend in May, I searched the room for a friendly face, knowing no one, and I sat down at a table with three women. One woman was leading the conversation with a fluid southern drawl while the two remaining women – red eyed, with tears streaming down their cheeks – listened and nodded their heads in agreement.

This was what I had signed up for... grief in its raw form with total strangers. What was I thinking? Why was I there? Am I nuts? I soon discovered that one can meet a total stranger at TAPS and within an hour be hugging her to comfort her. I learned that this was a place, where I was drawn to come, to share the company of those deeply affected by the loss of a military family member, and to find a connection... and I haven't regretted it since!

Through the course of that day, I got to know the women better, and agreed

to meet them again the next morning. I was then introduced to another woman through one of the red eyed girls, and later a sixth was drawn to our group because we were laughing and smiling while waiting to be seated for dinner. Yes, I said laughing! We enjoyed dinner, maybe a little too much, and allowed more laughter to surface than tears to roll. At that point in the weekend, we had all had enough of the serious grief, and needed an outlet.

We found the outlet in each other. We may not have been properly solemn while we dined but at that time we experienced something more profound than the regimented, culturally accepted mourning. We bonded. Women who lost their remarkable, brave, and noble men found in each other a common connection. We discovered that some of us were mothers, some newly married, some newly stricken, some long married, some long suffering; the common

thread was that all were trying to cope. We toasted our great guys in heaven with the thought and hope that those guys were gathered up there, all together, doing the same thing.

I am grateful for this mystic journey that TAPS has brought me on. I am in constant contact with these amazing five women via email. Two of us got together at the Philadelphia TAPS Regional Seminar in July. Some of us have plans to meet at the Marine Corps Marathon in October. Two of the girls are trying to organize an immediate trip overseas with another so she can visit her former base to attend a memorial service for her husband, and meet her husband's unit, which has come back from the war. We have reached an incredible level of sisterhood in very little time. We are all grateful for each other, support each other, and understand each other.



# Table When...

I find it very hard to explain this closeness to civilians. It is an intricate, complex, yet simple bond. But the basic sense of community that existed in our military lives before our loss has been replaced two-fold by a bond of understanding through experience: the white van in the driveway, the gloved hand knocking on our door, the accepting of the triangle- folded flag, the unending impossible-to-interpret paperwork from the government, the solitude... \*sigh\*, the inability to socially interact for a good year, the word widow, the lack of legacy in having no kids, the worry of legacy in raising fatherless kids, and on and on... We just "get" each other, and accepted each other from first introduction. It is the cliché of belonging to a club you never wanted to join, but are grateful to be a part of. ☆



From left to right:  
Sarah Greene, Mindi Campbell, Jocelyn Stewart, Laura Cooley, Artis Henderson, and Jaime Boris

*I am so glad I set my tray down on that table my first day at TAPS. Through the tears and laughter, we found each other.*

*I am grateful. Thank you TAPS for bringing us together and helping us forge an incredible sisterhood.*

# Good Grief Camp Helps Kids Overcome Loss

*Losing a loved one is always devastating - especially for a child.*

By Monica Wood Hill

To help with the grieving process, several Fort Sill children of Soldiers who have lost a parent attended the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) over the Memorial Day weekend in Washington, DC.

The 14th Annual National Military Survivors Seminar and Good Grief Camp began as a way to help survivors deal with the difficult and complex process of grief. The motto for TAPS is Remember the love, Celebrate the life and Share the journey.

The Good Grief Camp is for young survivors such as first-time attendee Tristan Cordero, a 9-year-old who lost his father, Gunnery Sgt. John Cordero, seven months ago. Cordero said he thought the TAPS workshop was really cool and it changed his life.

"Since my dad died, I felt like I was falling down a bottomless pit and then I came into TAPS and I felt like the pit had ended," he said. "I found peace by meeting other kids who had similar experiences."

Cordero said he has felt better since he went to the workshop. "I'm glad my mom took me to TAPS," said Cordero. "It seems

kind of smart that they actually made a place where all the people who lost their loved ones get together and help each other and understand what each person is going through. I met other kids and realized I wasn't alone, there were other kids going through the same thing as me."

Cordero said he was amazed at how many children were in the Good Grief Camp and he thinks he will go again.

"I made a lot of friends and I want to go back next year and see them again," he said. "I liked having a button with a picture of my dad on it, but my favorite part of TAPS was the balloon release," said Cordero. "I wrote a note to my dad and then tied it to a string connected to a helium-filled balloon. I got to tell my dad how I feel. Then all of us kids released the balloons up into the sky."

Cordero said he would like to see a TAPS program at Fort Sill. "I think it would be pretty cool to have a TAPS here at Fort Sill. I think there are a lot of kids here who have lost a loved one and could benefit from finding out there are other people who know how they feel and what they are going through," he said.

Cordero said he also built a bear in the arts and crafts course. "We got to build a bear and we each made a recording that we put inside the bear and then when you squeeze the bear it plays the message," he said.

"My bear said 'I am a special bear to remind you of your dad.' My mom and I both also got a comfort blanket from TAPS."

Weston Haycock, who is the 12-year-old son of Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Haycock, has attended the TAPS seminar ever since his father died six years ago.

"Being around other kids who have lost a loved one makes me feel like I blend into the crowd," said Weston. "The best part of going to the TAPS workshop is hanging out with all the friends I made the first year I went to TAPS. I see the same friends and my TAPS mentor every year."

Weston said the first year he went to the seminar he didn't know what to expect. "I think the workshop helps the kids not feel the loss so bad and it helps them with the grieving process," he said. "Sometimes I help the newer kids with the grieving process, but mostly I hang out with my friends."

Ashlynn Haycock, Weston's 17-year-old sister, also said seeing the friends she has made over the five years was the best part of going to TAPS. "I have several friends who I see every year and it's really like a family reunion."





Ashlynnne said the first year at TAPS was really comforting for her because there were kids there who understood the pain and grief she was going through. "I think for me, the first year I was there to get through the grieving process, but now I go to help others get through that process. Next year I will be 18 so I can be an actual mentor at the program and I'm really excited about that," she said.

"I think the most effective part of the TAPS program is that most military kids don't see or know many other kids who have lost a family member and can relate to them. Being at the TAPS workshop helps them because there are a lot of kids who relate and understand," said Ashlynnne.

"Since I'm the oldest child in the family, I do feel a special responsibility to help others going through the grieving process," she said. "Especially when we went to the Vietnam Wall, there was a

9-year-old girl, which is about how old I was when I lost my dad, so I really could relate to her. She looked lost and I could tell she didn't know what to expect - it was her first year as well."

Ashlynnne said she thought the TAPS program is very beneficial and that many of the children from Fort Sill who have lost a parent should consider going. "It's an amazing program and they would get a lot out of it," she said.

According to their mother, Nichole Haycock, there were 269 kids at this year's camp. "The first year we went there were 40 kids in the Good Grief Camp," she said.

"The schools and military communities are doing a great job focusing on children dealing with deployments and multiple moves. Supporting surviving children is just another step in the right direction," said Nichole. "The bottom line is that if we spend all our time being angry about what we lost, we would grow up angry, miserable and lost." ★



**TAPS 15th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar**

**Save the Date!**  
**Join us May 22-25, 2009**

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 Published June 26, 2008

*Celebrate the Life*





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# The Words My Heart Can't Say

By Ron Grangier

*My heart will always hold you, in my arms you aren't there  
The love that I have learned for you, now embraces the pain I bear  
You are with me every moment, throughout each and every day  
Your spirit always comforts me, through the words my heart can't say  
The time we've spent together, can never be enough  
Each moment had a tenderness no sorrow can rebuff  
I continue living in this world, for you, my dearest friend  
The sharing of the love we had, leaves not a bitter end  
I feel you in the morning mist, your passion in autumn's leaves  
I smile for you in many ways, while my heart still silently grieves  
Though my life at times seems empty, it is full from knowing you  
I know that I have lived a life that knew a love as true  
Please understand that these tears I shed, are just another way  
Of longing for the essence in the words my heart can't say  
There is a void left in my life, that no passion can fulfill  
I pray that through the grace of God, in time, this will heal.*





# Finding Joy in the Midst of Despair

The value of humor in grief resolution is sometimes hard to see, especially in the early weeks, months and even years of grief. Yet, without a sense of humor, the world would be a dark, dreary, and unforgiving place.

A sense of humor is a valuable tool for coping with grief. Although your sense of humor may appear to have been deleted from your being, if you can allow it to return (even just a little) the journey through grief may be a little less painful. It may hurt to even think a humorous thought at first, but even in the opening hours and days of grief, there are often little things that may strike us as funny. We are so often caught in the shock and numbness of grief that we might not even recognize these "little light moments" or if we do, we may feel guilty for even having a light moment.

But if you can capture those light moments, then you will discover one wonderful thing about humor: When you cry, you are spending energy and sending out oxygen. When you laugh, you are banking energy and bringing in oxygen. Each time you laugh or even chuckle, healing oxygen comes into your body; and we can use all the healing we can get!

Just as your perspective on many things changes as you grieve, your sense of humor may change as well. Do not judge these changes; simply

acknowledge them as being a natural part of the grieving process. Begin to regain your sense of humor by allowing yourself to be open to experiencing those moments of lightness that may suddenly appear, even at the funeral. Some might call these moments sick or dark humor, but they are neither sick nor from the dark side of anything! Cherish them as signs that you can still find joy, even in the midst of despair.

## **A simple technique to try:**

Whenever you experience a difficult thought, memory, or moment, open your non-dominant hand (right or left) and "place" that thought, memory or moment into that hand. Send those thoughts to your open hand. Now close that hand tightly... make a fist and keep it tightly closed. You do not want to lose that thought, moment, or memory... no matter how painful.

When you have placed that difficult thought or memory into your non-dominant hand, open your dominant hand (right or left... the other one). Now think of something that makes your heart sing, and your eyes smile. Make it something wonderful about your loved one.... a quick story, a happy memory, a special little moment that you have always loved. You might have to work hard (at first) to remember a happy memory or thought, as grief is often a thief... stealing not only our loved one's presence, but all the happy memories

as well. If nothing comes to mind, try to remember the color of your loved one's eyes. Call someone if you have to and ask for a happy memory. Write it down if you are afraid you will forget this wonderful moment.

Then place this wonderful happy thought into your dominant hand and close your fingers around it... making a tight fist, just like the fist you have made with your other hand. Now you have both a difficult thought/memory and a happy thought/memory. You can hold them both, but with practice and commitment, eventually your dominant hand will begin to hold more good thoughts and memories than your non-dominant hand.

And one day, if you work hard enough and allow it to happen, you will wake up and remember **FIRST** that you're loved one lived, not just that he died. And **THAT** is a GREAT day!!!

Humor helps bring balance back into our lives, at a time when we may not believe there will ever be another joyful moment to be found. Search for those moments and memories. They are there, tucked away in the recesses and corners of your being, just waiting to be rediscovered. If your loved one ever laughed when he was alive, then you can do no less than to continue that wonderful legacy of joy. ★

*May love be what you remember the most!*





[www.Griefstore.com](http://www.Griefstore.com)

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

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

By Darcie D. Sims, PhD., CHT, CT, GMS

## FEELING FRIZZLED IN A FRAZZLED WORLD?

Try taking a moment to:

Watch an autumn leaf spiral downward from its branch to the ground.

Catch a sunbeam as it sparkles across an arc of water from a sprinkler.

Notice how leaves shimmer in a breeze.

Gaze into the coals of a campfire and watch the smoke curl upward into the night.

Take your cap off and let the breeze ruffle your hair.

Let a lemon drop stay on your tongue and feel the tartness send crinkles to the corner of your eyes.

Watch clouds make pictures across an afternoon sky.

Let music find its path to your heart.

Share a warm cookie with a friend, each trying to let the other have the last bite.

Feel a stream tickle your bare toes.

Breathe in moonbeams and try to catch a falling star.

Dance to your own music and sing in harmony to your own rhythms.

Make a game out of your TO DO LIST and finish it tomorrow.

Laugh, or at least try.

Pet a puppy.

Follow a bird on its flight and wonder where it is going.

Sit in the grass and make flower rings.

Walk on an old path and kick leaves.

Count to ten and then do it again.

Remember a moment and let it become a lifetime.

Let the tears come if they do and let them trickle down your face.

Find a safe place to scream and do it... if only in your mind.

Watch fireworks with a friend.

Give thanks for the traffic jam... it gives you more moments to explore.

Don't be in such a hurry- tomorrow will come eventually.

Give up and hide in the closet... for a moment.

Run away and join the circus... for an hour.

Plug in the coffee pot and enjoy a quiet moment, watching it perk.

Listen to the copy machine and wonder what it thinks about all day.

Close your eyes and let your fingers tap out a soul message on the keyboard.

Listen to your heart and follow it.

Wander in your despair.

Pull the covers over your head and remember making a tent out of the bedspread.

Tell a secret to yourself.

Just for a moment... don't look for anything. Just BE.

# Marine Corps Marathon 2008

## The T★A★P★S Run & Remember Team

By Ami Neiberger-Miller, APR • TAPS Public Affairs Officer



Their feet pound the pavement, and their dog tags clink with each step. Some days they run alone. Other days they run with a friend. They are widows who lost the loves of their lives, parents who buried their sons and daughters, buddies who saw a comrade fall, and children who will grow up without a parent. They run to remember and honor the people they've lost, and many of them say it's an empowering and transforming experience.

The TAPS Run and Remember team includes surviving family members and their supporters, who train for and run the Marine Corps Marathon, which is held in our nation's capital city the last weekend of October. They'll run the marathon, the 10K, and even the 1-mile kids fun run. They'll wear t-shirts emblazoned with photos proudly celebrating the lives lost, and spur each other toward the finish line.

Amid the thousands of runners who participate in the Marine Corps Marathon each year - the TAPS Run and Remember team is a testament to the power of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming sorrow. Their loved ones may have fallen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, or closer to home in a training crash or accident - but the runners say they will never be forgotten.

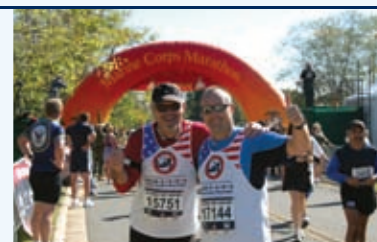
They're runners like Leticia Jones, who supported her friend Xiomara Hall, when news arrived that Xiomara's husband, U.S. Marine Lt. Col. William G. Hall, had been killed in action in Iraq earlier this year. "I am running to honor Will and this year of firsts for his wife Xiomara and their four children. They have become more than friends; they are our family," wrote Leticia. Xiomara Hall will be running her first marathon in memory of her husband, and is leading Team Semper Fi in the marathon, which includes eleven runners.

For some, the training is a way to re-connect with something they've lost. Sixteen-year-old Katrina Wert will run the marathon to remember her father, US Marine Corps Master Sergeant Michael Wert. He drowned while saving two boys at a North Carolina beach, urging Katrina to haul the boogie board and swim for shore with the two boys. Following his death, Katrina, an avid cross-country runner, gave up her sport. But after hearing about the TAPS team, she decided to put back on her running shoes and run to honor the memory of her father. Her brother, Michael, age 8, will honor their dad in the Healthy Kids Fun Run this year.

When Renny Parker ran the Marine Corps Marathon in 2006 for the very first time, it was only months after the death of his son, US Marine Corps Sergeant Eli Parker. Renny ran again in 2007, and now has recruited nine of Eli's friends and family members to run alongside him. His wife Donna is running the 10K this year. Renny wrote, "I live in central New York and I'm running the marathon in memory of my son, Marine Sgt. Elisha Parker, who was killed in Iraq on May 4, 2006. I also run and remember those close to Eli who gave their lives in Iraq: Cpl. Tyler Fey, LCpl. Robert Moscillo, Cpl. Stephen Bixler, and others."

Deborah and Thomas Bonn will run the 10K in memory of their daughter, U.S. Navy Ensign Elizabeth Bonn, 23, who was killed in 2006 with three others when the training flight she was on crashed. "Beth" was attending officer flight school in Pensacola and had earned a college degree with an ROTC scholarship. This is the second year her family has participated in the Marine Corps Marathon.

The 2008 Marine Corps Marathon will be a first for Katie Weikel, of Colorado Springs, Co., who has never attempted a marathon. After her husband, Chad, lost his only sibling, Ian, in Iraq in 2006,





Weikel found running to be a lifeline. She writes, "I have spent the past two years running with Ian's memory. My runs have served as my time to remember him, talk with him, and miss him. He has been my motivation and fueled me forward when I didn't have the energy to continue on. Just as my runs with Ian have kept me going, the support of TAPS has kept Chad going. What better reason to finally run a marathon than in Ian's memory and in the support of TAPS?"

Another runner will fulfill a pledge made to the person she lost, by running the Marine Corps Marathon, again. Jamie Boris will run the marathon only weeks before the first anniversary of her husband's death in Afghanistan. She lost her husband, US Army Captain David Boris, when an IED took his life and that of his gunner, Sgt. Adrian Hike. She wrote: "I am running to honor Dave and Adrian and to fulfill the plan that Dave and I had to run the Marine Corps Marathon together. Dave was not only my husband and my best friend; he was also my favorite running partner. I ran my first marathon, the 2004 Marine Corps Marathon, while he was deployed to Iraq. After he returned, we trained for and ran two marathons together (Berlin 2005 and Vienna 2006), and planned to run the MCM together after we moved back to the US from Germany. This October 26th I know he will be with me for all 26.2 miles as our friends and I run for TAPS in his honor."

Mary Calhoun and her husband, Gary, will watch the marathon from the sidelines this year, but their spirit will be with a special runner every step of the way. They're traveling from Michigan to Washington, DC to meet Daniel Luethje. Daniel ran the marathon last year to honor Mary's son, US Marine Lance Corporal Nicholaus Manoukian,

who lost his life in Iraq in October 2006. Again this year, Daniel will run the marathon in memory of Nicholaus. Mary and Gary are looking forward to meeting Daniel for the first time. While at the Marine Corps Marathon, they will meet another family who lost their son in the same combat operation in Iraq.

Mindi Church lost her husband, CW2 Theodore "Tuc" Church on Memorial Day 2007, when his helicopter crashed after receiving heavy enemy fire in combat. She will run the marathon in his memory and writes on her runner page, "TAPS has been a great way for my kids to see that they are not alone in their new walk through life. It has shown them that it is okay to be sad or happy to miss their dad but still be able to enjoy their lives and remember Tuc in happy ways. That whatever they feel is okay."

Like many others, Amanda Dodson of Anchorage, Alaska, will not run the Marine Corps Marathon alone - she'll have the helping words of her father and running partner, Gary Dodson, beside her every step of the way. They're running in memory of Amanda's fiancé, U.S. Army Corporal Jason Corbett, who died in Karmah, Iraq in 2007. Amanda wrote, "Jason was an active athlete and outdoorsman. As much as Jason enjoyed running, participating in this marathon is a wonderful way to honor him."

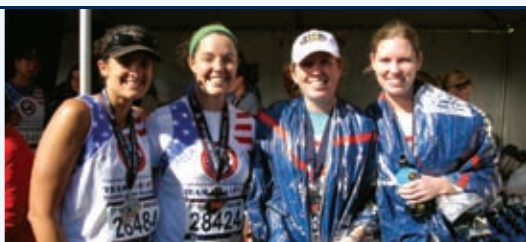
On her run, Amanda will carry with her a photo Jason gave her before deploying to Iraq. On the back Corbett wrote, "I know what you are about to go through is going to be tough. It takes a very special woman, but that's exactly what you are. You are my special woman. I'll always be thinking of you and the great experiences we had. Always looking forward to the experiences to come. I know we cannot be together physically, but know that

I am always with you mentally, and together we can accomplish anything. I love you with all of my heart and soul, and can't wait to see and be with you again."

The TAPS Run and Remember team began with one runner. In 1996, Marie Campbell lost her husband, US Air Force Sergeant Dee "Soup" Campbell, when a terrorist truck bomb exploded at the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia and took the lives of nineteen airmen. "TAPS helped me so much in those early years, and I ran the Marine Corps Marathon as part of my own healing," said Marie Campbell.

"Now I do this to give back to others who need grief and recovery support, so TAPS can continue to support the many surviving families who've lost someone serving in the military and are walking the road I once walked down," said Campbell. Today, Campbell is the director of the TAPS Run and Remember team, and busies herself organizing chats that motivate runners, and overseeing the host of organizational challenges posed by holding a three-day event attended by more than 250 people. The event includes a pasta dinner, memorial slide show, and bus service to the starting lines. And yes, she also trains. She'll be running her eighth marathon this year.

Organizers say that even if you can't run across the finish line, you can volunteer with the TAPS Run and Remember team, donate on a runner's web page to memorialize a fallen hero, or visit the race course in-person with a sign and noisemaker to cheer TAPS team members to the finish line. And of course, there's always next year. TAPS fields running teams in the Army Ten-Miler (early October), the Marine Corps Marathon (last weekend of October), and the Historic Half (May). ★





# For Better or Worse

Thirty-six years ago, on December 2, 1972, I became a single parent of three when my husband Tony, a career Air Force officer on his second tour of duty in Vietnam was listed as Missing in Action. The A-7 he was piloting on a combat mission had literally disappeared beneath a cloud covering, and subsequent search and rescue attempts proved futile. It would be more than two and a half decades before we would learn his fate.

During that time, I lived not knowing for sure whether I was a wife or a widow. I was 30 when Tony was missing, with the responsibility of raising a ten year old son who was growing his hair long because Dad said he could, an eight year old daughter who regularly cried herself to sleep asking for her Daddy, and a three year old son who understood the situation even better than I realized.

Today, my children are well balanced, productive, and patriotic members of society. They are good people. How I accomplished the daunting task of raising them alone remains somewhat elusive. I often wondered whether it was my efforts of A, B, C, D, or none of the above that actually helped each child through a particular problem or phase of his life. Certainly the grace of God and my rising to the occasion day in and day out were key factors.

For the many new mothers and fathers facing the challenge of single parenthood caused by war, I offer my heartfelt empathy and some practical tips from someone who has truly 'walked a mile in your shoes.'

## **You Are Your Greatest Resource.**

While taking full advantage of the many resources available to today's military families, don't lose sight of the fact that you are the greatest resource your children have. Being a single parent will take sacrifices of time, energy, and money. It helps to take a "How can I solve this problem?" versus a "Who can solve it for me?" approach.

## **Tell the Truth.**

Tell your kids the truth about what war is: people trying to kill one another for a cause. And tell them the truth about what happened to their loved one, and about your emotions surrounding the loss. (Keep in mind that children may need their information administered in child-sized doses.) My kids say it's the most important thing I did for them. They also valued the photos, letters, cassette tapes, high school and college year books, letter jacket and other mementoes of their dad I saved and shared with them.

## **Depict a Human Hero.**

While your child's lost parent is indeed a hero to you, them, and the United States, be careful not to make him superhuman. By depicting your spouse as human, with failures as well as successes, you create a more realistic view for your child. Set high standards, while remembering that no one can live up to perfection. Seek balance with the photos you display, the letters you share, and the stories you tell, and consider your timing.

## **A Few Good Rules.**

In our family, they were simple: Don't lie. Don't steal. Obey me.

## **Take Time to Discipline.**

When you discipline your children, no matter how hard it is - and it will be - don't act on how sorry you feel for them regarding their loss. Overindulging your children and failing to discipline them will lead to trouble. Teach them early and often that actions have repercussions; each choice has a consequence.

## **Pick your Battles.**

Before you decide to make something an issue with your child, consider whether it pertains to his or her character or something more superficial. Appearance issues such as hairstyles or fashion choices are usually not the place to wage your battles with your kids. Save the big arguments for real issues that involve your child's character.

## **Teach The Value of Money.**

Offer your children opportunities to earn their allowance. If they're old enough, help them chart their own chore list and monitor it. Allow them to do small paying jobs, such as raking your lawn. Then have them save some of the money, share some with a charity, and spend some on something they choose. Most importantly, be a visible example in your own management of the family's finances.

## **Keep the Faith.**

Give your children a foundation in faith. The synagogue or church will reinforce what you're trying to teach them at home. Faith is much harder to learn later in life, than it is to learn and experience as a child. Give your children a chance at faith by bringing them to church.





### **Stay Involved with School.**

You don't have to join the PTA or sign the kids up for travel soccer, but stay tuned to their school experiences. Other students and teachers may not understand or have empathy for your child's loss, and may even be aggravating the situation. Set a time to talk with the teacher, guidance counselor, or students to help them better understand what has happened, and how they might help.

### **Hold Family Meetings.**

While kids need to understand that the parent-child relationship is a benevolent dictatorship rather than a democracy, they may benefit significantly from a regular, open forum for airing their thoughts, ideas, and grievances. You may find yourself surprised by their depth of understanding of a particular matter.

### **Sponsor an Orphan.**

Helping others in an area of personal pain and loss can be tremendously therapeutic. Sponsoring a child who has lost both parents can be an effective way for your child to learn firsthand that there are others in a similar situation especially if the child takes an active roll in the process (sharing money from his piggy bank or writing to the sponsored child).

### **Raise Your Kids to be Independent.**

While it's almost counter-intuitive after such a loss, your bravery in instilling a sense of independence in your children will be richly rewarded. While your instinct might be to cling to them, and have them cling to you, you should resist. You owe it to your child and yourself, to raise him to be self-reliant.

### **Instill a Work Ethic in your Children.**

In the beginning, school will be their job, and they should be encouraged to spend the necessary time, effort, and energy to do their best at it. Your job may be making your house a home and earning the family income. Set an example for your children to follow.

### **Don't Rush into a New Marriage.**

While it may seem that you are providing your child the mother or father figure you know he is missing, a new marriage could actually increase his feeling of insecurity. It's their own mom or dad that they are missing right now, not necessarily a mother or father figure. Your kids need you to be there with them through that pain. For a time at least, you yourself may be the best replacement for your fallen spouse. During this time, practice discretion with regard to romantic relationships.

### **Build a Team.**

Before your spouse was missing, your family worked as a team, with each member making a different contribution. With one team member gone, it's all the more important that the team remain bonded. As team leader, think about which values you want to instill and how you can accomplish that. Choose a few activities that your family can readily engage in, such as biking, swimming, or soccer. Guard against trying to do everything and spreading yourself too thin. As team leader, it's important to take care of yourself, so you can better care for your team. Consider making your home the center of some activities, a place your kid's friends will want to visit. That way, you'll have a clearer view of what your kids are up to and with whom.

### **Communicate with your Children.**

If you are there for your children when they are little, acknowledging their drawings and helping them learn to play Go Fish, you'll develop a rapport with them and they will talk with you when they're 13 or 33. Don't allow your heart and mind to be so consumed by your loss that you miss being truly present with your kids now. If you aren't really with them now, you run the risk of their not being with you later in their lives.

### **Love them.**

My kids often joke that our family motto must be "whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." They'd sometimes shorten it to "builds character!" or just a wink and nod as they painted the house, cleaned the garage, or dug a flower garden in our back yard on a Saturday morning. I was a hands-on parent partly because I had to be, and partly because I knew that in doing so, I could instill in my children the standards Tony and I embraced. Trust your instincts and love your children, even when it has to be tough love.

When Tony's crash site was finally found and excavated, his remains repatriated and identified, we held a funeral for him in October of 1996 with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. I was surprised when my children gathered that day at the podium not only to honor and remember their father, but also to pay tribute to me for the loyalty I showed him in raising them "right."

"For better or worse," that was part of my marriage vows. ★

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## **By Bomette Shine**

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*Bomette Shine's husband Lt. Col. Anthony C. Shine, USAF was listed as Missing in Action in 1972 and accounted for in 1995. In his absence, she successfully raised their three children: Anthony, 45, married to Collette, is a Vice President with Chubb Insurance in Manhattan. Colleen, 43, married to Marcus, is a marketing consultant in Arlington, VA and the mother of two. Shannon, 38, married to Ellen, is the father of three and a Vice Principal at Icahabod Crane Middle School in Valatie, NY. Bomette worked for many years as a spokesman for the POW/MIA issue doing print, television, and radio interviews as well as countless speaking engagements on behalf of America's prisoners and missing. Her charitable endeavors also include helping establish Citizens Against Spouse Abuse (CASA) in Myrtle Beach, SC.*



# Helping Military Kids Cope With Traumatic Death

Ordinary fears are a normal part of a child's developmental growth, and children create internal and external mechanisms to cope with these fears. But a child's ordinary fears can be transformed into very real survival fears in the face of severe trauma. After children experience the death of a parent, they often feel alone and different. Frightened because their once comfortable world now seems unpredictable and unsafe, they may react in ways that we as adults can truly not judge, understand, or anticipate. The impact of a dad's or mom's death in the military can be so traumatically disturbing that the terror involved with the death and the way the parent died may override a child's ability to grieve in a natural way, and share sadness and frustration.

Events can cause panic, stress, and extreme anxiety in kids' lives, and the feelings are heightened with each new instance reported in the media. The terror that grips our children in these circumstances emerges from situations that suddenly overwhelm them and leave them feeling helpless, hopeless, and unable to cope. Trauma is defined by the Encarta® World English Dictionary as "an extremely distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock and may have long-lasting psychological effects." This unexpected and shocking event destroys a child's ability to cope and function in a normal way.

Children can suffer from a state of trauma that can develop into Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, in which present events trigger memories of trauma resulting in panic, anxiety, disorientation, fear, and all the psychophysical feelings associated with the traumatic memory.

## Signs of traumatized children

Seven-year-old Joey's dad was killed in Iraq. He constantly questioned Mom. "Tell me exactly what happened. Did my Dad suffer?" Joey had nightmares and regressed to bedwetting. Tyler's dad was killed by a stray bullet during military combat. His father would always tell him "Nothing can stop me from coming home." Tyler constantly worries about where the bullet hit him, did it hurt him, was he unprotected, and did he die instantly. He began having stomachaches and panic attacks, worrying his mom could get killed too. Jonathan's dad was killed in a firefight in Iraq. Instead of being honored as the son of a military hero, he was often victimized on the playground by a school bully. Jonathan kicked him and both boys were punished. His grades dropped from straight A's to F's after his dad died.

Many young people may experience physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms. These signals range from stomachaches and nightmares to poor grades, isolation, depression, regression, and hostility.

Caring adults need to recognize the signs of grieving and traumatized children, and they need to be aware of the techniques and resources available to help bring safety and protection back to the child's inner and outer world. For example, listening to children's thoughts and feelings, and providing a safe means of expression helps teachers, parents, and educators reinforce their ability to ensure a safe and protected environment.

Traumatized children tend to re-create their trauma, often experiencing bad dreams, waking fears, and recurring flashbacks. Young children have a very

hard time putting these behaviors into any context of safety. Many withdraw and isolate themselves, regress and appear anxious, and develop sleeping and eating disorders as a mask for the deep interpretations of their trauma. Young children engage in post-traumatic play by compulsively repeating some aspect of the trauma.

The most common identifying factors that children are re-experiencing the event are play reenactment, nightmares, waking memories, and disturbing thoughts and feelings about the event. Sometimes kids avoid reminders of the traumatic event and show little conscious interest.

Many traumatized children exhibit hyper arousal by increased sleep problems, irritability, inability to concentrate, startle reactions, and regressive behaviors.

When caring adults can identify traumatized kids, they can normalize grief and trauma signs and develop ways kids can express their feelings and emotions. Parents, educators, and other caring professionals can model, present, and support comfortable ways to bring safety and protection back into kids' lives.

Young children developmentally live in an egocentric world filled with the notion that they have caused and are responsible for everything. George's dad was deployed to Iraq twice. Over and over George explained to his teacher, "It's my fault my dad died. I should have made him stay home from Iraq." Some kids may also feel survival guilt. They may think, "Why am I living when so many others have died?" Adults can reframe guilt and magical thinking from "What could I have done?" to "What can I do now?"





### At-risk behaviors

Children may begin to exhibit at-risk behaviors after a traumatic event. The frequency, intensity, and duration of these behaviors are important factors to consider. Children may experience post-traumatic stress, revisiting the traumatic event through outside stimulus like photos, music, and the media, or by reliving the sights and sounds of the tragedy in their minds. Expect children to re-experience a degree of their original trauma on the anniversary of their parent's death.

The following behaviors may be indicators that a child may benefit from professional help:

- ★ Sudden and pronounced change in behavior
- ★ Threat of suicide or preoccupation with suicide, evidenced through artwork or writing
- ★ Harmful acts to other children or animals
- ★ Extreme confusion or incoherence
- ★ Evidence of substance abuse - drugs, alcohol, etc.
- ★ Sudden change of grades
- ★ Avoidance or abandonment of friends
- ★ Angry or tearful outbursts
- ★ Self-destructive behavior
- ★ Inability to eat or sleep
- ★ Over-concern with own health or health of a loved one
- ★ Giving away important possessions
- ★ Sudden unexplained improvement in behavior or schoolwork
- ★ Depression, isolation, or withdrawal

### Activities that help kids express thoughts and feelings

Helping children to establish a sense of order in an ever-changing and chaotic world is important. Not only do we want our kids to realize they are survivors of a difficult event, but they also need to know that their life still has continuity and meaning. Parents and educators working with traumatized children should keep to the daily routine as much as possible. This allows kids to feel a renewed sense of security.

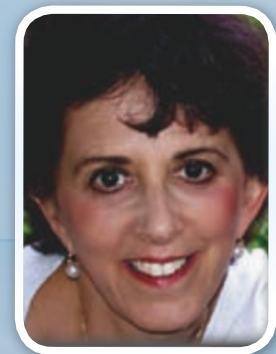
Establishing family activities also has a reassuring effect on children. Preparing meals together, eating dinner as a family, reading stories aloud, or playing family games can help to reestablish a sense of normalcy to kids' lives. It is important to initiate safe places for kids to express their ideas. This can be done by finding quiet times at home, in the car, or on a peaceful walk. Being with children without distractions can produce a comfortable climate to begin dialogue. Bedtime should be a reassuring time, too. Often, this is the time children choose to talk about their worries. Parents can consider an increase in transition time, storytelling, and book reading to create a peaceful, uninterrupted nighttime environment.

### Hope for the future

The sudden death of a mom or dad in military service can shatter a child's emotional and physical equilibrium and stability. Too many boys and girls experience fear, isolation, and loneliness after a parent's traumatic death. Faced

with a myriad of losses ranging from parental death, moving, change of school, reduced income level, and public mourning, many children are left in a world where they see no future and no protection.

One goal of trauma work with children is to restore safety and protection to children who have experienced the loss of a parent in combat. Another goal is to provide parents and youth workers with information, understanding, and skills related to the issues creating trauma. With these tools we can help our children become less fearful and more compassionate human beings, thereby increasing their chances of living in a future world of increased inner and outer peace. ★



By

**Linda Goldman**

MS, LCPC, FT

*Linda Goldman is the author of Life and Loss, Children Also Grieve, Raising Our Children to Be Resilient, and Breaking the Silence: A Guide to Help Children With Complicated Grief. She works with traumatized children in her practice near Washington, D.C.*

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Web: [www.childrensgrief.net](http://www.childrensgrief.net)





*We find our way in the dark  
using light from the lives of others.*

*Their sufferings and celebrations  
are like constellations in the midnight sky,  
orienting patterns above the horizon.*

*Tracing their paths through the night,  
we connect our stories to one another;  
circling together, we turn toward morning.*

*-Reverend J. Lynn James*





Remember the *Love* ★ Celebrate the *Life* ★ Share the *Journey*



**TAPS 15th Annual National  
Military Survivor Seminar**  
**Save the Date!**  
**Join us May 22-25, 2009**



*If you have been affected by the death of a loved one in the military, whether it was a family member, friend or fellow service member, you are warmly invited and encouraged to attend these special days of comfort, sharing, support and information.*



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## Accomplish The Mission...



Join with TAPS in furthering the mission to bring comfort, care, help, and healing to the families of our fallen heroes. Please consider making TAPS part of your planned charitable giving this year through workplace giving:

- If you are a federal employee or member of the armed forces, TAPS is a member of the Combined Federal Campaign, affiliated with the Military, Veterans, & Patriotic Service Organizations of America.

**TAPS CFC number is 11309**

- If your workplace United Way Campaign allows directed donations, simply write Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors in the space provided.

***Thank you for sharing our mission to support the loved ones of those who died in service to America.***



The Independent Charities Seal of Excellence is awarded to the members of Independent Charities of America and Local Independent Charities of America that have, upon rigorous independent review, been able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that they meet the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness. These standards include those required by the US Government for inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign, probably the most exclusive fund drive in the world. Of the 1,000,000 charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 50,000, or 5 percent, meet or exceed these standards, and, of those, fewer than 2,000 have been awarded this Seal.



# T★A★P★S CARE GROUPS OFFER COMFORT

Grief can feel so isolating, but you don't have to be alone. Through TAPS, we have a family of thousands of others who are walking this journey with us. The heart of TAPS is our peer support network, where we find others who truly understand our grief because they have gotten that knock on the door, received that folded flag, and wear that gold star lapel pin.

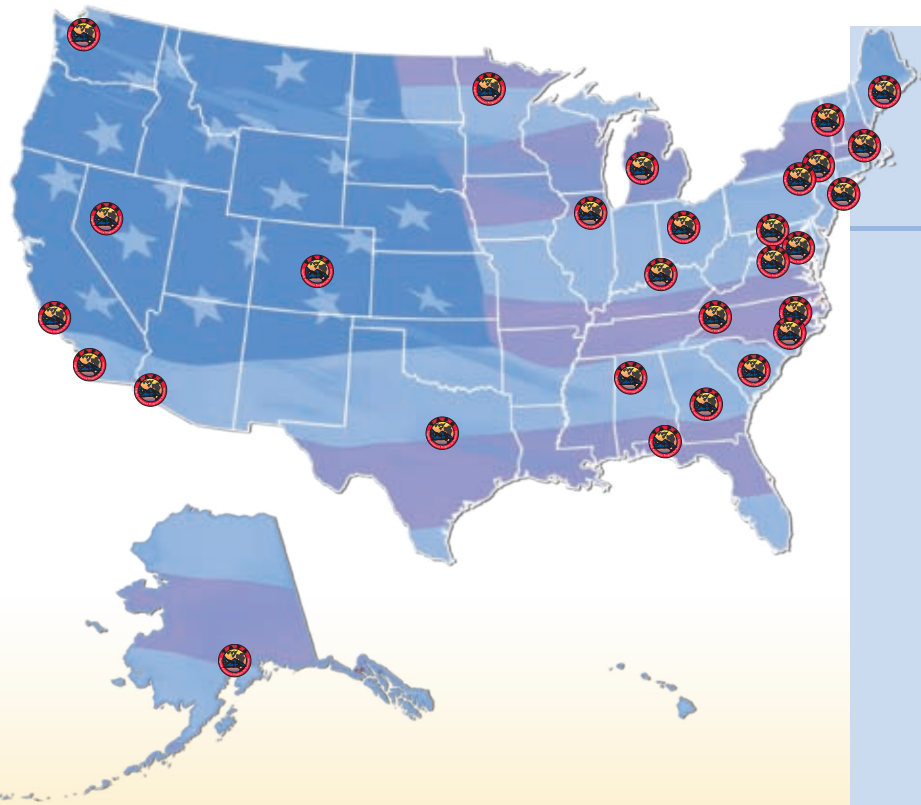
To meet the mission of facilitating peer-to-peer support for those grieving a loss in the military, TAPS encourages and facilitates TAPS Care Groups

around the country at locations where we can come together to remember the love and celebrate the lives of our loved ones, and share the journey of grief with those who truly understand.

TAPS Care Groups are informal gatherings of surviving military families, co-hosted by a TAPS Peer Mentor and a mental health professional. These groups aren't therapy groups, but they are therapeutic. They meet at a safe, easy-to-find location with parking available.

All those who are grieving the death of a loved one in the military, without regard to circumstances, relationship to deceased, branch of military service, or geography of death, are welcome to attend. There is no charge to participants, and the meetings are set at a regular time and date that best accommodates those desiring to attend.

For more information about a TAPS Care Group near you, visit [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) or call 800-959-TAPS (8277). If one isn't meeting near you and you'd like to start one, we can help you!



**TAPS Care Groups are currently going on, or getting started, in the following states:**

- |                             |                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Alabama</b>              | <b>Michigan</b>       |
| <b>Alaska</b>               | <b>Minnesota</b>      |
| <b>Arizona</b>              | <b>New York</b>       |
| <b>California</b>           | <b>Nevada</b>         |
| <b>Colorado</b>             | <b>North Carolina</b> |
| <b>District of Columbia</b> | <b>Ohio</b>           |
| <b>Florida</b>              | <b>Pennsylvania</b>   |
| <b>Georgia</b>              | <b>Rhode Island</b>   |
| <b>Illinois</b>             | <b>South Carolina</b> |
| <b>Kentucky</b>             | <b>Texas</b>          |
| <b>Maine</b>                | <b>Vermont</b>        |
| <b>Maryland</b>             | <b>Virginia</b>       |
| <b>Massachusetts</b>        | <b>Washington</b>     |



# T★A★P★S Regional Seminars

Seminars Sponsored By:



Photos from Fort Carson, Camp Pendleton and Fort Hood

## Upcoming Regional Seminars

- ★ Ohio
- ★ Fort Stewart
- ★ Fort Bliss
- ★ Fort Lewis
- ★ Hawaii
- ★ Fort Benning
- ★ Fort Carson
- ★ Suicide Survivors Seminar
- ★ Surviving Spouses Retreat
- ★ Camp Pendleton
- ★ Camp Lejeune
- ★ New York City
- ★ Minnesota

"The TAPS Seminar at Fort Hood felt like coming home to a family that understood me, accepted me and loved me unconditionally. My daughter met other kids who stay in touch her with now, and we feel connected! We can't wait to see everyone again. Thank you, TAPS!"

"What a life changing day - I cried and laughed and learned, all at once, and made new friends who I know I'll have for life. When is the next Seminar at Camp Pendleton?"

"I wasn't sure how it would go, being a Dad and attending a grief group, but it was actually the first time I didn't feel like I had to hold back. Being there on Fort Carson, with the support of the commanders and the soldiers, and with other fathers was just great. It was a safe place to be."



[WWW.TAPS.ORG](http://WWW.TAPS.ORG)





# Every Man A Tiger

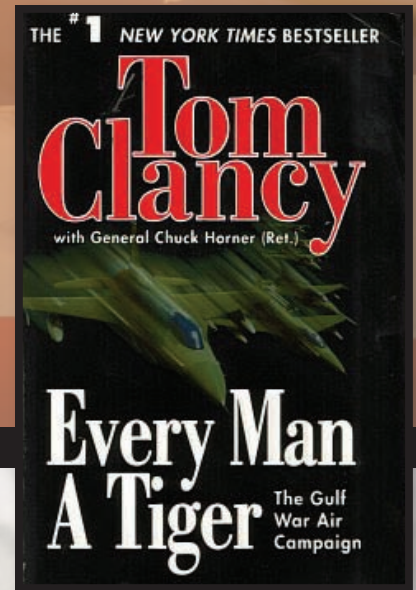
## An Excerpt From Tom Clancy

General Chuck Horner, as quoted by Tom Clancy, describes death in the Air Force this way: “[I] had a good tour at Seymour Johnson. The 335th was a fine squadron, and there was a lot of excitement with firepower demonstrations and plans to attack Cuba – in those days there was well-justified fear that the Russians would install nuclear missiles on the island. On the other hand, the otherwise joyous squadron parties and deployments around the world were tempered by the F-105’s bad habits, blowing up in the air or slamming into the ground, either of which meant somebody had to erase a name off the pilot board, empty a locker, and return the pilot’s effects to his widow or parents.

That happened when my flight commander ‘bit it’ – another one of those expressions people use when they don’t want to face the reality – when he flew into the water on the gunnery range off the coast of North Carolina. Parts of his body were recovered, and then came the ceremony of sitting with the grieving widow, taking care of the children, helping arrange for the funeral, and attending the memorial ceremony, with its missing-man fly by...” by now, all this was a familiar routine for Chuck Horner, except this time it all hit him on the head with a powerful new insight.

“At the funeral, I guess I was beginning to grow up, for I started to notice something about our warrior culture that I hadn’t really noticed before: the pain and agony of the widow. Hey, fighter pilots are tough. When one of us died, we felt sad, got drunk, and made jokes, in an effort to laugh in the face of our own deaths. But without our knowing it, it was our wives who really suffered. Air Force wives are indoctrinated from the get-go. ‘Don’t make a big issue over a death. Don’t make a thing about the loss. Cover it over. Don’t get your own pilot husband upset. He needs to be alert and to concentrate when he’s flying his six-hundred-mile-an-hour-jet.’ And they do cover it over. Meanwhile, the wives, and not the warriors, know the real horror.”

Among the American Plains Indians (so the story came to me), when a warrior died in battle, everyone was happy (dying in battle was about as noble an act as you could imagine)... everyone except the warrior’s widow. She tore her clothing, rubbed ashes in her hair, cut her arms with a knife, and wailed as though her soul had been torn out







*“Service wives,  
especially fighter pilot wives,  
are the most underrated  
warriors in the world.”*

of her body. For the widow, it was more than losing her husband. Rather, with her husband dead, she no longer had standing as a human being in the tribe. Unless she remarried, she would cease to exist in the eyes of her former friends, and she would be left to fend for herself. When the tribe moved on to new hunting grounds, she'd fall behind, she'd have nothing to eat, and soon, she'd starve, or else weather or wolves would kill her. For the warrior's widow, in other words, the death of a warrior husband was a sentence condemning her to a death that was lonely, slow, and shameful.

Our warrior society, I began to see, isn't all that different. The husband would die. The widow would be comforted, food would be brought over, there'd be tears and shared memories and that missing-man flyby that chilled all of our souls. But Monday would roll around, the pilots would go back to their jet aircraft mistresses, the wives would go back to raising kids and bonding with one another, and the movers would be pulling up to the widow's house. She no longer qualified to live on the base; and her former pals, her inner circle, didn't want

their own husbands hanging around her, lest she snag a new husband. Worse, none of our warriors, husbands or wives, wanted her reminder of the death that lived seconds away whenever we strapped on our jet and took to the wild blue yonder.

It hit me then that, daily, our wives had to contend with the unspoken horror of all that. Not only did they dread our death, but just as real was the knowledge that their lives, as members of an extremely close interdependent society, also hung in the balance. And I came to appreciate the steel in their unspoken and unacknowledged courage – as opposed to our own drunken ribaldry, which we pretended was 'guts' – in the ever-present face of death. The pilots were scared children who used booze, offensive behavior, and profane language to hold the awareness of their fragile mortality at arm's length. But our women shared a gut-wrenching horror that someday the wing commander would show up at their front door to announce that they were now going to have to provide for and raise the children alone, that they were

about to be turned out into the world to fend for themselves, and that their closest confidantes in the world would soon stare through them, lest they see what might be in store for themselves.

Service wives, especially fighter pilot wives, are the most underrated warriors in the world. Daily, they confront their own fears, staying home to change a dirty diaper and getting ready for the next move, while shoring up the inflated egos of their mates before they go off to chase around the sky. God bless and watch over them.” ★

**EVERY MAN A TIGER**  
Tom Clancy

Berkley Publishing Group  
Notification  
ISBN: 0425172929





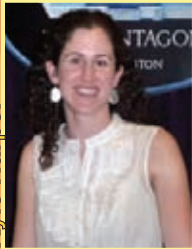
# TAPS Staff Spotlight

Walking the Walk- Vanessa Gabrielson and Kyle Harper

Vanessa Gabrielson



Kyle Harper



## Vanessa Gabrielson

Vanessa's dad, SFC Dan Gabrielson, was an Army Reservist serving with the 652nd Engineering Unit from Wisconsin when he was killed by an RPG in Ba Qubah, Iraq on July 9th, 2003. Vanessa was twenty years old at the time. By May of 2005 Vanessa was already volunteering at the National Good Grief Camp as a mentor for other children who had lost their dads. She has attended every event since then, first as a mentor and then as a Group Leader. For the last year she has worked as a Group Leader of the 4-7 year olds at the Regional Good Grief Camps, as well. If asked, Vanessa will be the first to tell you, "I can't help but feel as if my dad has had a hand in my becoming involved in TAPS from the very beginning. I honestly believe that he has guided me through this journey." Vanessa comes to TAPS with a BS in Elementary Education from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Her goal? Find the best resources out there for our families with children... and assist in building upon the wonderful programs that TAPS already offers to aide our youngest survivors. She will be acting as liaison with national organizations focused on infants and toddlers. One of her first projects is working with Sesame Workshop on the third installation of their "TLC - Talk, Listen, Connect" series. She will continue to assist in planning, as well as continuing to be a Group Leader for Good Grief Camps. Her favorite thing about her job is "the wonderful people I have had the pleasure of meeting... especially the children I work with. They have so much more courage than anyone could ever imagine; they are my little heroes!" The hardest thing about Vanessa's job is "Knowing that all of the wonderful opportunities I've been given exist only because my dad gave his life..."

## Kyle Harper

Kyle's fiancé, SSG Michael Hullender, was an army medic stationed at Ft. Richardson, Alaska. He was killed in Iraq by an IED blast April 28th, 2007, while assisting a soldier who was injured. After his death, Kyle wanted to do something, hating the helpless feeling of not being able to change what happened. "I still can't change what happened to my fiancé or those who loved him, but I believe TAPS can make the journey easier. I remember how grateful I was when other [surviving military] women called me to tell me I'd be okay. I hope my work here can help someone in a similar way." Kyle comes to TAPS with a BA in Women's Studies from Georgetown University, and is currently a candidate for a Master's in Women's Studies at George Washington University. At TAPS, she is a Survivor Program Staff Assistant. One of her projects is to create resource guides for new survivors. "I remember the 'haze' and 'fog' that I lived in after Mike died, and how hard it was to understand anything. So if we can create a guide for new survivors that lets them know what is available, not only in the way of financial benefits, but emotional supports, gifts for families, and educational opportunities, it will make one tiny bit of the journey easier." One thing Kyle loves most about her job "is that I believe what I'm doing is honoring my fiancé. I was afraid Mike's death would only hurt and bring pain. But now I know that I can still draw strength from him. I can still be inspired by him, and that is a wonderful thing." Continuing with her graduate work in women's studies, Kyle finds "It's an awesome testament to the strength of so many [surviving] women that they can achieve so much and do so many amazing things after the death of a loved one."





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