

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED AND DIED

# T★A★P★S<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE | SUMMER 2019



FOUND MY NICHE ★ SUCCESS IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE

#LOVELIVESON ★ ANNIVERSARY BLUES



# Dragonfly

Having flown the earth  
for 300 million years,  
dragonflies symbolize  
our ability to take  
time to reconnect  
with our own strength,  
courage and happiness.



WENT TO



1994 **25** th 201  
Anniversary



FROM OUR FOUNDER

# Foundation of Love

## To Our TAPS Family,

Summer is upon us and we are happy to share the latest issue of *TAPS Magazine* with you! Through stories, shared experiences, and resources you will gain a sense of community and connection to provide hope, inspiration, and strength.

Our theme for the recent National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp was "Love Lives On." Our loved ones died, but we can never forget they lived extraordinary lives that included selfless service. They gave us their precious gifts of patriotism and service and they loved us with all their hearts - and we will always love them with all of our hearts.

That love lives on within us and through us and it continues to grow as we connect and support one another. In the coming months there are a variety of ways you can stay engaged with your TAPS family. Get to know fellow survivors from the comfort of home via our social media @TAPSOrg or in our online chat rooms. Sign up to attend an upcoming Regional Survivor Seminar or TAPS Family Camp. Go to a TAPS Together in your local community, and if there isn't one already let us know and we'll start one. Request a Peer Mentor or a grief counselor if you'd like individual support. Call our Helpline at anytime to talk, or chat with us from our website.

As we head into the long, hot summer it may be hard to face these days when others are going on family vacations or enjoying family time at the pool. Our lives are forever changed, and we may want to consider new family traditions now, or we may choose to revisit times we had with our loved one. Whatever feels right to you, right now, it's okay. Be kind to yourself. And be gentle with yourself. You have support from your TAPS family, and we are here to help you in any way you need. Call on us.

With hope and love,



# TAPS

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### Our Mission

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

## TAPS is here

**24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK**

- ★ National Military Survivor Helpline  
24/7 at 800.959.TAPS (8277)
- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Connections to Community-Based Care
  - ★ Casework Assistance
  - ★ Emergency Financial Assistance
  - ★ Education Resources and Support for Post-Secondary Education
- ★ TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing
  - ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Seminars, Retreats, One-Day Gatherings
  - ★ Sports & Entertainment Events
- ★ Good Grief Camp for Children/Teens
- ★ National Military Mentor Program
  - ★ Young Adult Program
  - ★ TAPS Online Community
  - ★ *TAPS Magazine*

For more about the resources we provide, turn to page 27.

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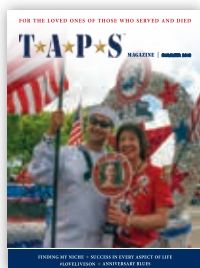
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Surviving mother Angela Oey and Petty Officer 2nd Class Johnathan Bellomy honor Angela's daughter U.S. Army flight surgeon, Captain Grace F. Oey at the National Memorial Day Parade.

#LoveLivesOn



# Dear TAPS...



## THANKS FOR NOT GIVING UP

I just wanted to say thank you to everyone in the TAPS team and to all donors and contributors. I lost my nephew, SPC Robert Rolland Sage, in July 2013 as a result of suicide and TAPS has been there and touched my heart in so many ways. Although I haven't "opted-in" for any events, counseling, meetings or help, TAPS has sent me emails, cards and reminders that I'm not alone. You seem to know when I'm hurting and you're there - even though I've been silent. I've watched your videos, watched the live stream of the congressional hearing on veteran suicide and have read your articles. Thank you for everything. I'm slowly working through my grief in my own way (a personal photographic portrait project) and will take advantage of TAPS service eventually. When things just aren't so raw. Thank you for what you do and not giving up on us slow folks.

### Pam Sage

Surviving aunt of  
SPC Robert Sage, US Army

## INVESTING IN CHILDREN

Victoria, this past weekend (TAPS Southern Regional Seminar and Good Grief Camp) was amazing! We have been walking this grief journey for nearly two years and I am so thankful we found TAPS. Thank you for what you do and for how you and your team invested in Teaghan. There have been so many beautiful tears this week as she reminisced on her time at camp and her mentor. He was the perfect match for her - she said he reminds her of dad and she genuinely felt cared for. Thank you all for making her journey a little more bearable! I just wanted to personally reach out and say thank you - words really do it no justice. We are very grateful!

### Erica Lewis

Surviving spouse of  
CPL Tyone Lewis, Jr., USMC Veteran

## A SAFE PLACE

I want to share with you Bonnie Carroll what a wonderful experience we had this weekend. You and your team have showed my family nothing but love and acceptance and have made us feel like we are family. Thank you for honoring Benny's memory

and letting us have a safe place to laugh, share, cry and grieve.

### Christina Romero

Surviving spouse of  
MAJ Benny Romero, US Army

## THANK YOU FOR REMEMBERING

I wanted to let you know this message today on Chris's birthday means more to me than I can put into words. I want you to know, your message is the only message from anyone letting me know they remember and understand that despite life moving on, today still holds special meaning. Today still feels somewhat...empty - so thank you. Thank you for remembering. You made my day better.

### Kenya Lockamy

Surviving significant other of  
Sgt. Peter Christopher Bohler, US Army

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Having had the opportunity for more than 20 years to interact with many veteran-focused programs and organizations, I believe TAPS is one of the most important, effective and



needed organizations among the thousands out there serving veterans. I place TAPS in a small handful of organizations serving veterans (I include the Elizabeth Dole Foundation in that hand, with shared gratitude for her federal advisory committee leadership) who are truly making a huge difference. I just wanted to let you know how much I respect all that you do.

### Mary 'Dubbie' Buckler

Organizational Effectiveness Consulting

#### ALWAYS THERE

I cannot thank you guys enough for the sweet message (Remembrance Email). TAPS has helped me so much with the loss of my brother. Still feels like yesterday we lost him. I remember when Kim reached out to us for the first time. My dad met Kim and her dad who was an amazing mentor to me in one of my first sessions in Florida. Grief may come and go but I know when it comes; TAPS is always there for me.

### Meghan Cook

Surviving sibling of  
HM3 FMF Timothy J. Cook, USMC

#### NOT ALONE

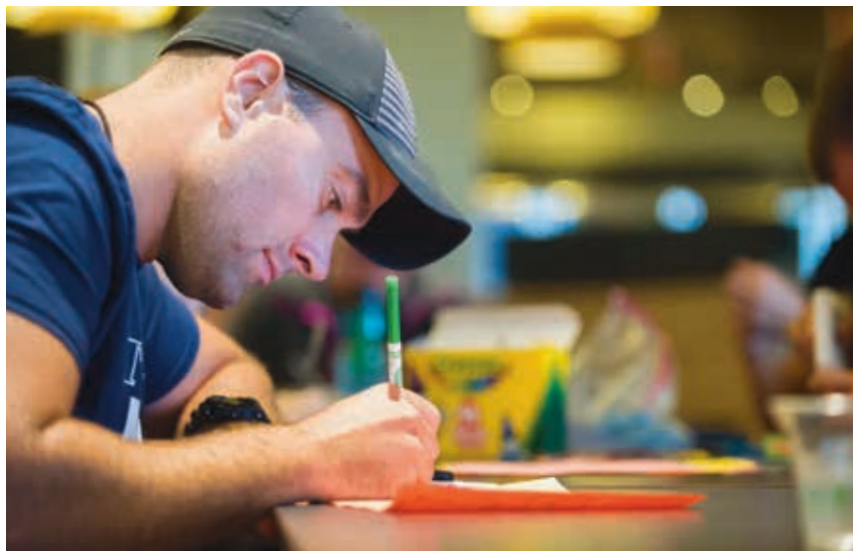
My daughter (age 6) really enjoyed the National Seminar. It was the first TAPS event we had attended. She loves her legacy mentor.

I was blown away by how we were treated. You promised no judgement, no time limits and to provide a safe zone for us to be ourselves. You delivered mightily!

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts and my husband would thank you if he could. He worried so much about leaving us alone but we aren't alone anymore! We have TAPS!

### Marcia Thompson

Surviving spouse of  
PFC Escom Thompson, US Army, Veteran



## Connect *with Us!*

### WRITE TO US

We welcome your thoughts about content in our magazine or any experience you have with TAPS. Please write to us at [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).

### SHARE YOUR STORY

Your stories can bring hope and healing to TAPS families. We invite you to share a story about your loved one or your grief journey. All submissions will be considered for TAPS *Magazine*, our blogs at [taps.org](http://taps.org), and other TAPS publications. We invite you to read our submission policy and submit your story at [taps.org/shareyourstory](http://taps.org/shareyourstory).

### JOIN US ONLINE

Find information on resources and programs on our website [taps.org](http://taps.org). You'll also find our blog and our Online Community with chats and message boards for connection to others from the comfort of home. Learn more at [taps.org/onlinecommunity](http://taps.org/onlinecommunity).

### SUBSCRIBE TO THE SATURDAY MORNING MESSAGE

The Saturday Morning Message is a weekly email written by and for survivors. To subscribe, send a request to [online@taps.org](mailto:online@taps.org).

### FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

 [facebook.com/tapsorg](https://facebook.com/tapsorg) | 
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 [taps4america](https://snapchat.com/taps4america) | 
  [youtube.com/c/tapsorg](https://youtube.com/c/tapsorg)

For more on TAPS resources and support, turn to page 27.



# Putting the Closure

## on the Use of the Word “Closure” in Grief

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

*“If you are seeking a time when you will be finished, you will never be done.” ~ TIBETAN SAYING*

In these contemporary times, you may be led to believe that you need to achieve “closure” after the death of someone in your life. As a matter of fact, you may have already experienced someone approaching you and asking, “Have you had closure yet?”

In fact, “closure” as an end goal in grief is such a common misconception that many people have thoroughly internalized it. If we don’t challenge this misconception, we are at risk for considering it a given – and we will no doubt struggle when we find that we’re unable to cross the mythical finish line. Why aren’t we reaching closure? Is there something wrong with us?

In our society, for a multitude of reasons – in part because of our need to try to put a happy face on things even when we should have proper sorrows of the soul, our lack of understanding of the role of hurt, pain, and suffering in the healing process, a desire for instant gratification, short social norms for mourning, lack of knowledge about grief and the need to mourn, and the inappropriate application of linear time-frames, we may lose patience with our grief when we really need to be self-compassionate.

For all too many people, closure means leaving grief behind and “putting the past in the past.” Sadly, it often reflects how people around you want to “move on with life,” even to the extent of inviting you to deny or ignore your grief entirely. Yet, when someone precious dies, this inappropriate goal of closure, is not only impossible but, in fact, undesirable. Just think – if we so completely detached from our life loses, we would not only close the door on the pain we would also cut off our connection to those that go before us.



No, nothing is wrong with us. What’s wrong is the goal of closure. The truth is that we as humans do not get over grief. There is no shutting the door. There is no tidy resolution or total sense of completion. There is no discrete end point. Just as love goes on, so too does grief.

While it’s true that when someone we love dies, the death ends – forever—our experience of live, bodily presence with that person, our love for them and our missing them go on. As the body is being laid to rest – an event that is sometimes associated with “closure” – we grievers are

just getting acquainted with our grief and our needs of mourning.

But there is hope! There is something we can work to experience in our grief. When we actively mourn – taking our grief from the inside to the outside, we are working toward healing. We are moving and changing. Over time and with the support of others, to mourn actively and regularly is to find ways to integrate loss into our continued living. Remember – our grief comes with us, we don’t “leave it behind.” There is no closure, but there is what I call “reconciliation.”

To heal in grief is to become whole again, to integrate your grief into yourself and to learn to continue your changed life with fullness and meaning. Experiencing a new and changed “wholeness” requires that you engage in the work of mourning. It doesn’t happen to you; you must stay open to that which has broken you.

Healing is a holistic concept that embraces the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual realms. Note that healing is not the same as curing, which is a medical term that means “remedying” or “correcting.” You cannot correct your grief, but you can heal it.



## Reconciliation Instead of Closure

Reconciling our grief means integrating our new reality of a life without the physical presence of the person who died. Not just surviving, but really living, even thriving. It typically takes months and years of hard work to get there. You very slowly, with no rewards for speed, begin to perceive a life different from what you had planned, a life where you are able to acknowledge the death while remembering the life. We are well served to remember that it is a cliché to say, “time heals all wounds.” As a matter of fact, grief waits on welcome, not time.

With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence and a capacity to become re-involved in the activities of the living. There is also an acknowledgement that pain and grief are difficult, yet necessary, parts of life. While it still demands your attention, you are not crippled by it.

As the experience of reconciliation unfolds, you will recognize that life is and will continue to be dramatically different without the presence of the person who died. We come to reconciliation in our grief journeys when the full reality of the death becomes a part of us. Beyond an intellectual working through of the death, there is also an emotional and spiritual working through. What had been understood at the “head” level is now understood at the “heart” level.

To choose the path that leads to reconciliation requires that you first descend, not transcend. You don’t get to go around or above or below your grief. You must go through it. And while you are going through it, you must also find ways to continually express it if you are to integrate it into your heart and soul.

You will find that as you begin to reach toward reconciliation, the sharp, ever-present pain of grief will give rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Your feelings of loss will never completely disappear, of course, yet they will soften, and the intense pangs of grief will become less frequent. Hope for a continued life will emerge as you are able to make commitments to the future, realizing that the person who died will never be

forgotten but that your life can and must continue. The unfolding of this journey is not intended to create a return to an “old normal” but instead a recognition of transformation: “an entire change in form.”

## Signs of Reconciliation

To help you explore where you might be on the path to reconciliation, I’ve created the following list. You don’t have to check each item for incremental healing to be taking place. Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In fact, if you are early in your work of mourning, you may not recognize any of these signs. Regardless, this list will give you a way to monitor your movement toward healing and trust that if you are actively mourning, you are on the path of integrating this transformative experience into your life.

- A recognition of the reality and finality of the death.
- A return to the stable eating and sleeping patterns.
- A renewed sense of release from the person who has died. You will have thoughts about the person, but you will not be preoccupied by these thoughts.
- The capacity to enjoy experiences in life that are normally enjoyable.
- The establishment of new and healthy relationships.
- The capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect.
- The drive to organize and plan your life toward the future.
- The serenity to become comfortable with the way things are rather than attempting to make things as they were.
- The versatility to welcome more change in your life.
- The awareness that you have challenged yourself to mourn heroically—and you have survived.
- The awareness that you do not “get over” your grief; instead, you have a new reality, meaning, and purpose in your life.
- The acquaintance with new parts of yourself that you have discovered in your grief journey.
- The adjustment to new role changes that may have resulted from the loss of your relationship.
- The acknowledgement that the pain of loss is an inherent part of life resulting from the ability to give and receive love.

Reconciliation does not happen all at once. Instead, it emerges much in the way grass grows. Usually we don’t check our lawns daily to see if the grass is growing, but it does grow and soon we come to realize it’s time to mow the grass again. Likewise, we don’t look at ourselves each day as mourners to see how we are healing. Yet we do come to realize, over the course of months and years, that we have come a long way.

One of my greatest teachers, C.S. Lewis, wrote in *A Grief Observed* about grief symptoms as they eased on his journey to reconciliation. “There was no sudden, striking, and emotional transition,” he wrote. “Like the warming of a room or the coming of daylight, when you first notice them, they have already been going on for some time.”

On the path to healing, there usually is not one great moment of “arrival” but rather a myriad of subtle changes and small achievements. It’s helpful to have gratitude for every small step along the way. If you are beginning to taste your food again, be thankful. If you mustered the energy to meet your friends for lunch, be grateful. If you finally got a good night’s sleep, rejoice.

Of course, you will also take steps backward from time to time on the path to healing, but that is to be expected. Keep believing in yourself. Recommit each day to your quest to reconcile your grief and have hope that you can and will come to live and love fully again.

I hope you’ll join me in my efforts to put closure to the use of the word “closure” in grief. The next time someone asks if or suggests that you’re reaching closure, tell them there’s no such thing. The conversation that ensues will help both of you – and our world. ★

---

*A longtime TAPS supporter, Dr. Alan Wolfelt serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. He has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (coauthored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll.) Visit [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com) to learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt’s books.*

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# Anniversary *Blues*

## Handling the Most Dreaded Day of the Year

Betsy Beard | Surviving mom of Specialist Bradley Beard

**T**he date is engraved on my heart. The awful day he died. Every year that date comes around again on the calendar, and for lack of anything better, we call it the anniversary of his death. It seems so wrong; anniversaries should be for celebrating a joyous occasion, not for acknowledging a death. But in the six and a half years since Brad's death, we have never come up with an acceptable alternate name.

He had a birthday, so I suppose we could call it his death day. But I can't seem to do

that; it sounds too raw, too unvarnished. Some call it an angel day and others refer to it as a memory day, personal memorial day, or deployment to heaven. Some people refuse to call it anything at all. No matter what we decide to call it, it hurts.

As the date approaches I feel listless, dreading the date on the calendar that signifies the loss of our family as we knew and loved it. The world presses down on me and I feel lost, distracted, touchy, dysfunctional. More than anything I feel inexpressibly sad.

I think that even if we didn't have calendars, we would still know that the date was near at hand. Every one of our physical senses can file information in our memory banks, some better than others. So on that bleak day in 2004, even though we felt shattered and numbed by the notification, our senses continued to record and catalog our external surroundings, mingling those memories with our emotional devastation.

Every year since then, tiny seasonal cues work surreptitiously in our brains, letting us know the dreaded day is approaching.

**As we are drawn back in time to the painful memories, the days can feel empty once again and the nights troubled. We might feel anxious for several weeks before the date or for some time afterward (or both).**



PHOTO LEFT: TAPS ARCHIVES; PHOTOS RIGHT: UNSPLASH.COM - DEBBY HUDSON, PAOLO NICOLELLO





The sunlight has a certain slant. The air smells a certain way. The temperature and humidity remind me of this. The leaves and sky looked like that. And once again my heart is heavy.

Those who study death and dying have a name for this phenomenon: anniversary reaction. As we are drawn back in time to the painful memories, the days can feel empty once again and the nights troubled. We might feel anxious for several weeks before the date or for some time afterward (or both).

At any rate, the anniversary reaction is a normal occurrence. We all seem to experience it to some degree. So what can we do to make it through the day? Above all, we can recognize and acknowledge that it can be a difficult time. We can lower our expectations of our capabilities and be gentle with ourselves. We can plan ahead to avoid stressful situations and prepare in advance what to do on that day.

Because we all grieve differently, it's a good idea to discuss the options with other family members. Being flexible to accommodate others' wishes may be difficult, but helps everyone to feel included. Talking about the day and having a tentative idea of what would work for all involved can alleviate some of the stress and dread.

Think about the coping mechanisms that have worked for you so far and try to incorporate some of them at this harder than usual time. As with other aspects of our grieving journey, trial and error is a valid way of determining what works. Plan to do what you think will help you the most. If it doesn't bring comfort, try something different next time. And if the day arrives and the plan doesn't feel right, feel free to change your mind and decide to do something else.

Rather than try to ignore one of the most important people in your life, it can be helpful

to focus on the extraordinary lives they lived. Those of us who have endured several anniversary dates have found a number of options for commemorating our loved ones.

### Here Are Some Ideas:

**1** Plan a memorial ceremony. The creation of memorial rituals can be part of the ongoing healing process, and these remembrances can take many forms. In the first weeks of loss, rituals helped to carry us through the pain-filled days and brought some meaning and stability to our otherwise chaotic lives.

**2** Light a candle in honor of your loved one. In the Jewish tradition it is customary to light a special candle that burns for 24 hours. The candle is lit on the anniversary date of the death, as well as during the initial mourning period immediately following a death.

**3** Take a personal day off work to sleep and rest. Grieving is hard work and takes its toll on your mind, body, and spirit. Do what you need to do to care for yourself. You will be better able to function in the future when you take time to be kind to yourself.

**4** Read letters from others about your loved one. Ask friends and family members to write their memories ahead of time and then gather to read them on the anniversary date.

**5** Cook your loved one's favorite meal or special treat and remember how much joy they derived from the time spent together over a favorite dish.

**6** Engage in one of your loved one's favorite activities. It could be watching the latest movie, going bowling, boating, gaming, hiking, or even skydiving.

**7** Host a fundraising event for something your loved one cared about. Many

survivors plan 5K walks, motorcycle rides, book drives, mission trips, or garden tours.

**8** Plant a tree or dedicate a bronze plaque or a flagpole (or all three) in honor of your loved one. This provides a tangible link to your loved one and is visible to the world.

**9** Visit and tend to the gravesite. Some survivors bring chairs, food, books, and music and spend the day there. One tradition is to scatter rose petals over the grave. Another is to pour their favorite drink there or "share" it with them.

**10** Write a letter to your loved one. Say what was left unsaid, or repeat what needs to be said again—that you love them and that your love is for always.

**11** Spend time with others looking through family photographs or watching home movies. Honor the good times you shared.

**12** Start a new tradition and do something outside of your normal routine: take a walk, watch the sunrise or sunset, volunteer with an organization that helps others.

Anniversaries, in the broadest sense, are days of acknowledging, honoring, and remembering. And part of dealing with our grief is allowing ourselves to remember. Memory helps us to preserve the bond of love we shared as we continue to live our lives.

Whatever you choose to do or not do, try to include something special that will honor your love and confirm your relationship—a relationship that has changed but has not ended. However you observe the day, be gentle with yourself as you find your way toward dealing with the one day of the year that you will probably never forget. ★

# Found *My NICH*e

## Running with Team TAPS at the MCM

Emily Dieruf Chambers | Surviving spouse of CPL Nich Dieruf, USMC

Thousands of widows share a common bond because of Operation Iraqi Freedom, each of us mourning and coping in a myriad of ways. Though it took me several years after the death of my husband, CPL Nicholas Dieruf, USMC to discover an outlet. Running quickly became a way to escape the days' stressors, connect with a newfound community of friends, and get any day started on a positive note.

Let me rewind back to 2002. In August of that year I met Nich while he was home on leave. An immediate attraction was evident, which led to several trips between Camp Pendleton, California (where he was stationed) and Kentucky. A romance blossomed and a promise ring given in January 2003 before his first deployment. Thankfully, Nich returned safely to the United States in summer 2003 where he proposed marriage over the July 4th holiday.

Orders for redeployment back to Iraq were received for mid-February 2004. Despite Nich's deployment preparations and me wrapping up my senior year of college, we continued to plan our dream wedding. The date was set: January 3, 2004.

The wedding was beautiful: weather unseasonably warm, Nich in his dress blue formal military attire and me in a stunning white gown. As a newlywed couple we honeymooned in Cancun then drove across country to enjoy six weeks together before Nich's redeployment. When we hugged and kissed each other goodbye on February 18, 2004, we reminded one another that October 2004 (when Nich would complete his enlistment and discharge from the Marine Corps) would be here before we knew it.



Tragically, two uniformed officers informed my in-laws and me that our Nich was killed in action on April 8, 2004. He saved his crew by taking a rocket-propelled grenade to the chest during an ambush, killing him instantly. Nich was buried with full military honors in Lexington's Calvary Cemetery Friday, April 16, 2004.

Emotions swirl when reflecting on my whirlwind courtship, engagement, and marriage with Nich. First and foremost, I'm often struck with a smile recounting our fun times together. Waves of sadness and tears are a natural occurrence as well. But more times than not I'm reminded of the heavy sense of gratitude I feel toward Nich. He taught me a great deal in our short time together, the heartiest of lessons being

one of unconditional love. Not the unconditional love parents have for their children, rather the ultimate, unquestionable, unwavering love one feels for their spouse. Prior to Nich I convinced myself of not being worthy of receiving that type love.

In Nich I found My NICH. I gained respect for myself, learned never to settle, and discovered a tough survivor within.

Likewise, in running I've also found My NICH. Friendships formed over the miles are one of a kind and I could not be more humbled or proud to run alongside a team participating with Team TAPS in this year's Marine Corps Marathon.

Running wasn't an immediate part of my wellness journey, however six months into the new lifestyle my best friend (an avid,

very experienced runner) suggested I try the Couch to 5k program. So I did. With her by my side I completed my first 5k, then a 10k, half marathon and eventually 20 miles.

I first learned about Team TAPS while researching charities to run in the Marine Corp Marathon. Original plans to run the MCM was supposed to be just my best friend and me; pounding out the miles together. However as we began to share our plans and my story, others wanted to join us. Before we knew it we had a group willing to run with us. Knowing I had a large group of friends who wanted to run the MCM together, the only way to guarantee entry for all was to join through a charity. Of course I was familiar with TAPS from my personal experience. The decision





**TEAM TAPS** honors our fallen heroes through running, walking, swimming, biking and many other competitive events throughout the country and also raises funds and awareness for TAPS programs.

To find out how you can participate or be matched with a runner to honor your hero, visit [www.taps.org/teamtaps](http://www.taps.org/teamtaps) or email [teamtaps@taps.org](mailto:teamtaps@taps.org)



was simple. It is an honor to give back to the organization that provided endless support to me in the early days after Nich's death.

It's my life's mission to never let my sweet Nich be forgotten, work which will never reach completion. Participating in events like the MCM is yet another avenue that helps with that mission. Keeping his memory alive is most fulfilling for me. To add, running has not only become one of my favorite ways to start the day, it has also connected me

with a newfound group of friends who are willing to support and run alongside me at the MCM - all in Nich's name.

At the forefront of that support is my current husband Dwayn. Dwayn is my earthly angel. From day one he has supported any events, fundraisers, family get togethers; anything that has to do with Nich including the upcoming Marine Corp Marathon. In fact Dwayn is often the one who comes up with new ways for us to honor Nich, and is

totally supportive of us raising our children to be fully aware of who Nich is and what he sacrificed for our country. I couldn't ask for a better support system!

What would I say to anyone thinking of running - Do it! But know your "why" for doing it. The "why" will get you through the challenges and hurdles that inevitably lie ahead. I will most definitely rely on Nich and my "why" in the upcoming MCM; may he give me strength! ★



# Success in Every Aspect of Life

## Growing Up and Growing Strong Together

Renée Monczynski | Manager, Young Adult Program

TAPS programming is guided by the belief that hope and healing can be found when we travel the grief journey together, connecting with those who understand our pain. Over the years, it became apparent that specialized programming was needed to bridge the gap between Good Grief Camp, which is for children up to 18 years old, and our adult programs.

TAPS Young Adult Program came about after more than three years of conducting research, said Renée Monczynski, who leads the program. Research and surveys of our young adult and older teen groups resulted in the building blocks for development of our Young Adult Program.

“What we found was that their questions and comments fell into five main pillars,” Renée said. The five pillars upon which the program is built are:

- Personal development
- Communication
- Career guidance
- Financial stability
- Service to others

Renée, the surviving spouse of Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Matthew Steven Monczynski and the single mother of a young adult daughter, said young adults may not have very different “grief issues” than children or adults, but in addition to their grief, they may also be navigating the often emotional transition from childhood to adulthood.

TAPS has developed an insightful, fun and intentional curriculum for 18 to 25 year olds. A Young Adult Experience may include a community service project; a high intensity outdoor adventure and a corporate day spent exploring career options. With practical life skills explored, the Young Adult Program strives to help each survivor create a well-rounded life full of hope, healing and growth.

In the past 3 years, TAPS has hosted over 100 young adults at Regional seminars, National seminars, and Experiences. At the Portland Young Adult Experience,





attendees white-water rafted down the White Salmon River as a team building adventure. The young adults cleaned up the trails of Mount Hood as a service project. In Louisville, the service project was to refurbish a playground in an underserved neighborhood and install a lending library. For the team challenge they completed a high ropes activity underground in a cavern. At both of these experiences they were able to learn tips to uplift and maintain physical, emotional, and mental well being while gaining skills in each of the pillars.

In 2019, TAPS will host workshops for young adults at each of our National and Regional Seminars. Additionally,

there are four Young Adult Experiences planned: San Antonio in June, Seattle in July, Atlanta in September and Colorado Springs in December. Experiences will focus on growth, healing, peer mentorship and professional guidance.

Each pillar of the program is thoughtfully and uniquely engaged throughout the week using workshops, hands-on activities, and intentional exercises. Personal development will be highlighted through learning life skills including meal prep, basic house maintenance, and communal living. Participants will be empowered in career development by being hosted by our corporate partners in a day at the office, tour of business, and meet and greet

with executives. They will learn financial stability through basic budget and credit health classes by a corporate donor and work in teams to create and execute a budget for meals for the experience. Participants will coordinate with a local service organization to continue to be a living legacy through service to others; and this will also be showcased in the way they take care of each other during the Experience.


We want to set up our young adult survivors for success in every aspect of life—career, work-life balance and service,” Renée said. “Our program goal is to lay a foundation for not only this transition but future transitions for our young adults.” ★

“This was my first experience being around other survivors my age, it was startling to realize we were walking a similar path. I don’t feel so alone anymore.”

“I didn’t realize how much was missing from my life, sitting around a table full of food we made together seemed to bond us even more. In a way I didn’t know was possible.”

“Being able to ask questions in a house full of people who wouldn’t judge me, but are here to help me find the answers myself, was simply empowering.”



 **DETAILS FOR OUR YOUNG ADULT PROGRAMMING WILL BE POSTED ONLINE IN OUR EVENTS CALENDAR.**  
For more information on the Young Adult Program, call our Helpline at 800-959-TAPS (8277) or email [youngadults@taps.org](mailto:youngadults@taps.org).



# #LOVELIVESON

## The 25th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

From across the country and around the world - survivors came together for a weekend of support and connection. Friendships were forged, hope was found, and moments occurred that touched the heart. And while there may have been tears, there were also smiles, laughter, and an atmosphere of strength and love. Together we listened, learned, and lifted each other up. We are TAPS. We are Family. ★

### FRIDAY



*“The TAPS National event was a safe harbor for my family. Nowhere else is there such a level of compassion, care, and understanding. TAPS is truly a national treasure.*”



Clockwise from top left: Hand in hand, survivors supported one another during workshops and care groups. Child gets a big hug from our mascot Klinger. A gentle touch and an encouraging word shared between TAPS family as we gathered in our Nation’s capital. TAPS Kids visited the WWII Memorial and other locations to learn how our nation honors those who have served and sacrificed.

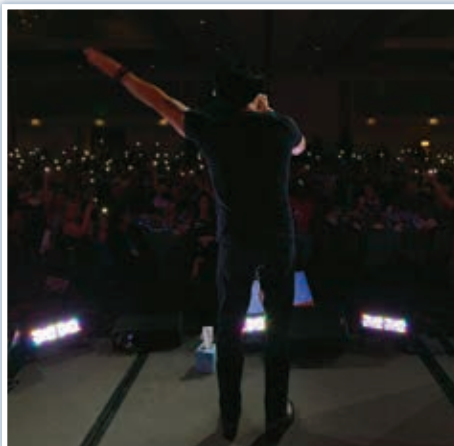
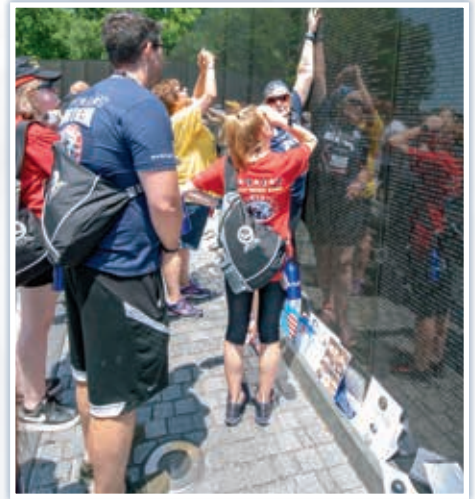
PHOTOS: TARA RUBY, NESSA CHASE, LENZY RUFFIN



# SATURDAY



*It really changed me. I walked in a broken person. No direction. No hope.  
I walked out as a new person. A better person.*



TAPS kids finding comfort and care from each other. Kids and their Military Mentors enjoying a dance at the Good Grief Camp Jamboree at the Washington Wizards training facility. Survivors created photo and art collages to reflect their journeys at the Artful Grief Studio. TAPS families visiting the Vietnam Wall. Ryan Weaver lighting up the night and leading TAPS families in an inspiring song. Military chefs lead by Chef Shane Cash in conjunction with Chef Robert Irvine prepared a sumptuous meal for our adults at a Saturday banquet dinner. Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva addresses TAPS families.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE CARBULLIDO, ARI STRAUSS, HANNAH SLUSSER, LENZY RUFFIN



# SUNDAY



*It was healing to be in a group with others who shared similar experiences.  
It gave me a sense of not feeling alone.*



*I feel like TAPS saved my life. Thank you for caring and all the love.*



TAPS is a global family. A map on display sharing the various home states and countries of our attendees. Tony David and WildeFire provided entertainment and allowed some TAPS kiddos to join in on the singing. Brett Jones leading a song performed by TAPS Good Grief Camp teens. Brett provided lessons and donated the guitars for the teens to take home as a remembrance and to keep practicing their musical talents! Good Grief Camp teens celebrating their graduation. Now they will venture to the TAPS Young Adult Program and also serve as Legacy Mentors. Hugs were everywhere during our National Seminar weekend.



# MEMORIAL DAY



*For so long I felt like I was alone in this world and there was no one that understood or really cared. It was at Good Grief Camp where I started to breathe again.*



TAPS teen Ashley Monczynski carries the American flag in the procession at Arlington National Cemetery. Families proudly participated in the National Memorial Day Parade on Constitution Avenue. TAPS Kids presenting their handmade wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. National Memorial Day Parade. Chef Robert Irvine, long time TAPS supporter with TAPS Founder Bonnie Carroll and Dominic D'Ambra on board the TAPS float at the National Memorial Day Parade. Our friends in the UK, Scotty's Little Soldiers joined our weekend of hope and love. Singer Ryan Weaver during the National Memorial Day Parade. Members of TAPS Ukraine at Arlington Cemetery. Ukrainian delegation attended seminar to learn how they can replicate TAPS support in their country.

PHOTOS: LENZY RUFFIN, NESSA CHASE, BRANDY MEJIA, ANDREA MADGE, TERENCE BROWN





# Peer Mentor Program

Claire Hunter, CT MA | TAPS Peer Mentor Coordinator

We have all heard them and even used them ourselves. I am talking about metaphors to describe grief and the grip it can have on us. The visual is often easier to say and understood by others when words are hard to find.

Grief is like a wave.

It comes in and out.

Grief is like being out in the middle of the ocean in a boat with no paddles.

You can't control the movement.

Grief is like a phantom.

Something that is scary and unknown.

Grief is like a roller coaster.

It can be unexpected and make your stomach feel like it is in your chest.

Grief is like walking into a dark room. You can't always easily feel your way through it.

Grief is like a maze.

You never know where it is going to take you.

And while it can help to find some way to explain what we are feeling, especially since it is unique - specific to how we are feeling in our own skin; what if we didn't always need words or descriptions to help someone else understand? What if the person you are talking to just knew? What if that person just 'got it?'

It is a dichotomy that while grief can be difficult to put into words, we often have a need to be heard to help us feel less alone. It can be especially meaningful to feel this sense of being heard and connected when a loss is attached to a specific culture, like military service.

Being heard, understood, and having a sense of community is at the heart of TAPS and is the mission focus of the TAPS Peer Mentor program.

Our program's foundation is the power of connecting to others with similar experience. Our one-to-one pairings of two adult military survivors offer a companion to new survivors as they face their unexpected path. In addition to our one to one matching; we also engage our peer mentors in leadership and facilitator roles supporting survivors within our care groups, TAPS Together, seminars and ambassador program. A TAPS Peer Mentor is a survivor who is at least 18 months beyond their loss who has reached a place where they feel ready to give of their time and their heart to be a supportive presence to a new survivor (their 'mentee'). Peer Mentors receiving training and become a vital part of our outreach and complete the circle of love that is TAPS.

We have often heard our mentees say, "My mentor just gets it." This brings relief and comfort to know we are heard and validated in our grief. It's as if a weight is lifted and makes the images we used earlier to help describe the potentially indescribable grip of grief in different terms. We now feel as though we have the strength to take on the grief waves and support others to paddle into more peaceful waters. That phantom of grief is less scary and more familiar. The roller coaster feels a bit smoother now. That dark room is finally less dark. And that maze seems to have fewer obstructions.

As one of our beloved Peer Mentors has so aptly described the experience of pairing two survivors together who have experienced similar loss: "Heartache and pain shared is heartache and pain halved."

Would you like to take your experience and help ease the heartache and pain of another? Please consider becoming a Peer Mentor. The gift of your presence can offer hope to another that through the waves and roller coaster of grief - they are not alone. ★



## WANT TO BECOME A PEER MENTOR?

Find out more at [www.taps.org/becomeapeermentor](http://www.taps.org/becomeapeermentor) or email [peermentors@taps.org](mailto:peermentors@taps.org).

Need that special someone who just "gets it?" Request a peer mentor today at [www.taps.org/requestapeermentor](http://www.taps.org/requestapeermentor)



# Join Your *TAPS Family*

**TAPS INSTITUTE FOR  
HOPE AND HEALING**

## SEMINARS

**JULY 10**

**Understanding Toxic  
Exposure Illness**

Coleen Bowman,

TAPS Senior Advisor on Toxic Exposure Loss

12:00 PM-1:30 PM ET

**JULY 30**

**Intimate Partners and Suicide:  
Finding Hope when the  
Unthinkable Happens**

Dr. Shauna Springer and Kim Ruocco, MSW

12:00 PM-1:30 PM ET

**AUGUST 13**

**Building Your Circle  
of Support After a Loss**

Denise Rollins PhD

12:00 PM-1:30 PM ET

Visit [www.taps.org/institute](http://www.taps.org/institute)  
for more information

**JULY 12-14**

**Western Regional Seminar  
and Good Grief Camp**

*City of Industry, CA*

**AUGUST 2-4**

**Midwest Regional  
Seminar and Good Grief Camp**

*Cleveland, OH*

**AUGUST 10-13**

**Maryland Family Campout**

*Knoxville, MD*

**AUG. 30 - SEP. 2**

**Tennessee Family Campout**

*Bolivar, TN*

**SEPTEMBER 13-15**

**Southeast Regional  
Seminar and Good Grief Camp**

*Jacksonville, FL*

**OCTOBER 11-14**

**National Military Suicide Survivor  
Seminar and Good Grief Camp**

*Phoenix, AZ*

**NOVEMBER 22-24**

**Northeast Regional  
Seminar and Good Grief Camp**

*New Brunswick, NJ*

*For a complete calendar of all TAPS  
events visit [www.taps.org/events](http://www.taps.org/events)*



# TOXIC EXPOSURE

## Raising Awareness – Providing Hope

*Coleen's husband was a devoted soldier. He deployed twice to Iraq between 2004 and 2008. He never failed a PT test and never went on sick call for his first 20 years of service in the Army. In March 2011, he passed his "over 40 physical" and received a clean bill of health. On the day of his exam, he told his civilian doctor he had not been feeling well and was experiencing flu-like symptoms. The doctor ran a few tests and prescribed Tamiflu. When he couldn't shake the symptoms, he went back to the same doctor and was told he had Lyme disease, for which he was treated with antibiotics. By mid-May that year, his health still had not improved and he had started to have severe night sweats. On June 11, 2011, he went to the hospital at Fort Bliss and insisted the doctors give him a proper diagnosis. Three days later, he was told he had cancer. It took some time for the doctors to locate where the cancer had originated, as it had since spread throughout his body - his lungs solid black and riddled with nodules. On June 14, 2011, he was diagnosed with non-operable stage IV cholangiocarcinoma, also known as bile duct cancer. Only 6,000 cases of the cancer are diagnosed yearly in the United States. Doctors did genetic testing and determined that his cancer had no genetic link and was instead the result of environmental factors, most likely the toxins he was exposed to in Iraq. After a 19-month battle, He passed away at his home on January 13, 2013 with his family by his side. His widow, Coleen, has since discovered that nearly a third of his platoon from his first deployment in 2004 has suffered from serious illnesses, including cancers.*



Coleen's story is not isolated. Similar experiences are shared by many of the over 10,000 illness loss survivors who have connected with TAPS since 2008. Of these, over 1,400 family members have self-identified as experiencing a toxic exposure-related loss. Many others may be unaware that their loved ones illness could be linked to toxic exposure.

What is toxic exposure? Toxic exposure refers to service members' contact with any number of environmental hazards they may encounter in the course of their

military duties. In the post-9/11 era, it is estimated that as many as 3 million American service members may have been exposed to dangerous toxins during their deployments overseas.

### SOURCE OF TOXIC EXPOSURE IN POST 9/11 SERVICE:

- Burn Pits
- Depleted Uranium
- Heavy Metal Poisoning
- Agent Orange
- Pesticides
- Blue Water
- Contaminated Water

### WHAT ARE BURN PITS?

Burn pits are open-air burning sites that U.S. military has historically used to dispose of trash in deployment areas. A wide range of refuse can be burned in pits including:

- Human/Medical Waste
- Packaging & Equipment
- Rubber
- Batteries
- Pesticides
- Electronics
- Plastics

Service members exposed to toxic chemicals while deployed have returned home and been diagnosed with rare and aggressive cancers and other illnesses thought to be related to their exposure. Robust independent research is needed to establish conditions associated with each type of toxic exposure and best treatment options.

*Susan's daughter was an Army mental health specialist deployed to Iraq between 2005 and 2006, and again in 2008. In 2009, she was discharged after she became pregnant. After giving birth to her daughter, she developed a persistent rash, muscle weakness and joint pain. She was tested for Lyme disease, and was later diagnosed with fibromyalgia.*

**TAPS IS LEADING THE WAY IN DEVELOPING AND CURATING A LIBRARY OF LEGISLATION, MEDICAL STUDIES, LITERATURE, REPORTS AND OTHER MEDIA AND RESEARCH RELEVANT TO THE ISSUE OF TOXIC EXPOSURE IN THE MILITARY.**





*She also suffered from severe stomach issues and was told she had chronic kidney disease and elevated liver enzymes. After having her gallbladder removed, she continued having one health issue after another. She was evaluated by the VA and rated at 100 percent disability. In 2016, she had a stroke and was told she had a large blood clot on her brain. Scans also showed a nodule on her lung. She died on April 27, 2017 at the age of 35. Her cause of death was marked as liver and kidney failure.*

TAPS is leading the way in developing and curating a library of legislation, medical studies, literature, reports, and other media and research relevant to the issue of toxic exposure in the military. The library will help TAPS educate the public and policymakers about the needs of families whose loved ones died of toxic exposure-related illness. It will also help TAPS educate the medical community and surviving military families about the causes and conditions associated with exposure-related illnesses.

It is a primary goal of the TAPS toxic exposure initiative to ensure that surviving families have access to all survivor benefits earned through the service of their loved one. The focus of the initiative is toxic exposure in the post-9/11 military. In partnership with Wounded Warrior Project and TAPS, Vietnam Veterans of America is also contributing knowledge, experience, resources, and networks developed through their work to understand illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure.

*Jennifer's husband was a chaplain deployed to Afghanistan for nearly a year in 2008-2009. When he returned home, he had a horrible cough that would not go away. In June 2016, he was diagnosed with stage IV ALK-positive lung cancer, a non-smokers' variety. His doctor affirmed that the cancer was likely the result of toxic exposure. Jennifer's husband was treated in a civilian hospital with a targeted therapy that quickly killed his tumors and put him into remission. The cancer returned, however, and became very aggressive. Jennifer's*

If you lost your military loved one due to an illness, we would like to help you have your voice heard. We are conducting a survey to help share your experience and have the legacy of your loved one honored. Information gathered from this survey will be shared in order to foster future policy and legislation as well as direct future TAPS programming.

<https://tinyurl.com/illnessSurvey>

*husband died on Christmas Eve 2016 at 52 years old.*

TAPS is working to provide all families who have lost military loved ones to illness with information to help them determine whether the illness may have been exposure-related. TAPS is dedicated to providing the most effective and supportive care for all who lost their military loved one regardless of the manner of death. ★

# Grief & Sleep

## 7 Tips To Cope with Insomnia After Loss

Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT

**C**oping with grief isn't easy. In addition to the emotional toll, there are a myriad of physical side effects. Sleeplessness is perhaps one of the most frustrating symptoms – when you are sleepy and can't sleep it just adds insult to injury. While insomnia is considered a common grief reaction, sleeplessness should not be ignored, but tended to mindfully.

When we don't get enough sleep it impacts our immune system, our mood, and our ability to handle our day-to-day tasks. Simply put, a lack of sleep can make us feel worse.

If you are experiencing grief and sleep loss, there are many possible causes. If you have lost a spouse, your empty bed will no doubt be a reminder of your loss. In addition to losing your loved one, there are many secondary losses that contribute to additional stress, such as the loss of income,

that can also keep you up at night. Even if your loved one did not share a bed with you, the loss can still impact your sleep.

### Grief & Sleep Tips »

Fortunately there are a number of things you can do to improve your "sleep hygiene" and invite slumber. It may take some time for restful sleep to return, but the actions below will get you there quicker. Your sleep is important to your healing, not only physically but emotionally too.

#### 1) EXERCISE DURING THE DAY

Exercise can help with sleep disturbances. Your body may be tired, so choose an exercise that will not push your body past its edge. Yoga for grief can help your body find its way back into equilibrium. A walk or hike will expose you to natural light, which will contribute to a healthy sleep cycle. Do not engage in vigorous exercise after 7 PM.

#### 2) AVOID CAFFEINE & ALCOHOL AFTER 3:00 PM

The National Sleep Foundation points out that even though alcohol can act as a sleep aid shortly after consumed, it

disrupts the second half of sleep once your body begins to metabolize the alcohol. Caffeine, of course, is the antidote to sleep. Try increasing your water intake during the day, but avoid it an hour before bed.

#### 3) RECEIVE MASSAGE OR BODYWORK

Therapeutic bodywork, such as massage, reiki, acupuncture or Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy, can help your body relax and bring your system back into balance which will in turn help you sleep better. Some people can feel the Relaxation Response kick in while receiving bodywork, and even report feeling like falling asleep on the table or mat. If you do schedule an appointment outside of your home, ask a friend to drive you to and from your appointment so you can relax completely.

#### 4) CREATE A SLEEP SANCTUARY

Sleep experts agree that the bedroom should only be used for sleeping and sex. Always avoid watching television or using electronic devices in your bedroom. If possible, set your thermostat between 65° to 68°. De-cluttering your room and including relaxing artwork, scents, and comfortable bedding can go a long way to make your room sleep approved.



SURVIVORS RECENTLY RESPONDED TO THE TOPIC OF SLEEP THROUGH THE TAPS SATURDAY MORNING MESSAGE. ★

**FROM MERRY, MOTHER OF WESLEY:** *My sleep patterns have been broken for as long as I can remember. I'm usually up every morning around 2am and have learned to accept the fact that this is my lot in life. I'm a very light sleeper. I use my tablet to listen to sermons or peaceful music and do breathing exercises to relax. I can usually get back to sleep eventually. Tart cherry juice has natural melatonin so I use that sometimes.*

**FROM CHERYL, MOTHER OF JACK:** *I have not found any answers about sleeping. I do drink a sleepy time tea and I try to 'turn my brain off' going to bed and reading. Sometimes when I wake at night I've tried to pray for family. I usually fall asleep before I get done. Other times I just give up and get up. I do the things as if it was time to get up.*



**FROM PERRY, FATHER OF CHRISTOPHER:** *In the weeks that followed the death of my son, my sleep habit had changed to where four hours was my norm. It wasn't that I couldn't sleep, it was more like I didn't want to sleep. I remembered a speech I had heard by Adm. William McRaven on changing the world, one task at a time. I took his words to heart every morning when I woke up and made my bed. As I added more daily tasks to my list of accomplishments, I found sleep came a little easier with every passing day. Even today, almost 15 years later, I have bad days remembering things. Sleep can be hard. Even on a bad day no matter what happened at the end of the day, my bed I made myself is waiting for me. To me it is being mindful to do the little things with focus so that on the day big things happen, I am ready for them. I am not a tea drinker, but as a kind of reward on one of these hard days, I will fix myself a cup of tea. Depending on my day, I have several different teas to choose from, but each is mentally and physically relaxing to me.*

**FROM CARRIE, WIFE OF WILLIAM:** *I've had a terrible time falling and staying asleep. I find exercising late in the day helps me to be tired when bedtime comes around. This is something I didn't do previously. I used to be a late sleeper, but since my husband passed, I'm up most days by 7 a.m. Guess this is my new normal.*

**FROM SHERYL, MOTHER OF ADAM:** *My sleep has been deeply affected since my son's death. To help me sleep, I keep very regular bedtimes. Bed is for sleeping only and I shut off screens at least a half hour before my bedtime.*

**FROM SAMIRA, MOTHER OF ANDRES:** *When I cannot sleep I make a tea with the skin from an apple (believe me, it works), and pray. I also hold Andres' pillows. This helps me when I have that sleepless night.*

**FROM SANDRA, MOTHER OF JOSHUA:** *I've always had sleep issues. After the death of my son, it became more difficult to sleep at night. With suggestions from my doctor and tips from the workshops at the TAPS seminars, I have tools to help me tackle my sleep issues. At the TAPS seminars I found Frank Campbell's workshop for people new to grief and the workshops on meditation extremely helpful. I open the blinds in the morning and close the blinds in the evening. Morning exercise is helpful for restful sleep at night. I love aqua jogging. I try to stop drinking all caffeinated drinks after 2 p.m. That means no tea, coffee or soda with caffeine after that time. The doctor also told me not to drink anything after 8 p.m. In addition, my room is completely black, because I have blinds and curtains. I have a rain sound on my clock, and I just recently purchased an aromatic diffuser.*

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**Would you like to join in the conversation with other survivors and respond to a variety of discussion topics? Send an email to [online@taps.org](mailto:online@taps.org) to be added to our Saturday Morning Message mailing list. Connect to your TAPS Family each week through your inbox!**

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## 5) TURN OFF ELECTRONIC DEVICES 1 HOUR BEFORE BED

Avoid using the computer or watching TV one hour prior to going to sleep. Make sure your room is dark. Recent studies tell us that blue light is most likely to contribute to alertness, so pay attention to the color of your digital alarm clock.

## 6) KEEP A GRIEF JOURNAL

Journaling for grief allows you to externalize your thoughts and stories. It can be a way to give yourself permission to discontinue the thoughts. Try journaling at least 30 minutes before bed, and imagine you can put everything down on paper that you are holding in your mind. You may also want to keep a sleep journal and pen by your bed, and write down any thoughts or sensations that are keeping you awake.

## 7) CHOOSE TO RELAX BEFORE BED

Schedule twenty minutes before you want to fall asleep to do some conscious relaxation. This can provide a bridge between wakefulness and sleep, which will help you

relax your muscles and calm your mind so you can rest, rather than toss and turn.

### RELAXATION MEDITATION

Your body has the natural ability to shift from stress to relaxation, you just have to know how to do it. The Relaxation Response or progressive muscle relaxation are two time-tested practices that can be done while you are lying in bed, so if you fall asleep you are already in place.

### YOGA

A gentle, restorative or PM yoga practice 30 minutes before bedtime can help you calm your mind and release physical tension.

### SOOTHING SOUNDS

Listen to natural sounds, such as ocean waves, or guided imagery as you fall asleep.

### AROMATHERAPY MEDITATION

Combine aromatherapy with counting your breath. Put a few drops of lavender essential oil on a cotton ball, and hold it under your nose or place it on the pillow

under your nose or place it on the pillow beside you. Begin to count each exhale starting with one and ending with 20. Then reverse the process, starting at 20 and ending with one.

### WATER RITUALS

Take a warm bath or drink hot herbal tea as a bedtime ritual to invite restful sleep. ★

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*Heather is the author of Mindfulness & Grief and a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. She hosts The Mindfulness & Grief Podcast, and leads self-care and meditation classes online through the Mindfulness & Grief Training Institute. She holds a masters degree in Thanatology, and is a certified yoga therapist. Visit [mindfulnessandgrief.com](http://mindfulnessandgrief.com) to download guided meditations and learn more about her classes and book.*

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# Postvention and Posttraumatic Growth

## Setting the Standard in Care following Suicide Loss

Dr. Carla Stumpf-Patton, LMHC, FT

TAPS has been caring for all those who have experienced the death of a military loved one since its inception in 1994, where outreach to survivors was established to offer support and resources to all, regardless of their relationship to the deceased or the manner of death. Always striving to enhance and expand services to meet the needs of the survivor community, in 2008 TAPS began building a groundbreaking, new program specifically designed for military families bereaved by suicide deaths. Under the leadership of Kim Ruocco, Vice-President of Suicide Prevention and Postvention, nearly 13,000 military family members, loved ones, and friends have received services and support for their grief related to losing a service member who has died by suicide. As a program founded by survivors, run by survivors, and developed for survivors, TAPS offers specialized care and resources that are responsive to this population by addressing many of the complicating factors around suicide loss that can often compromise the healing process, thus providing vital encouragement and knowledge for survivors that they do not have to face their grief alone.

TAPS is the leading Veteran Service Organization in military suicide postvention, setting the standard in best practices and quality of care, so it is equally important to understand exactly what postvention is: an intervention or a strategy of support offered to survivors in the aftermath of a suicide attempt or in most cases, a death by suicide. The goal of quality postvention care is to reduce the likelihood that survivors will face complications that can interfere with or hinder their grief, and ultimately, to increase the likelihood that they have a pathway to guide them towards a more healthy grief journey and recovery. Additionally, family members and loved ones bereaved by suicide often experience increased levels or symptoms of posttraumatic stress, in particular, for those who had first-hand or immediate exposure to the suicide. Under these circumstances, survivors are often left to cope with trauma (in addition to their grief), and where it is critical to receive the appropriate professional help to address these specific issues. In such cases, TAPS can help offer referrals for a trauma-informed therapist or the clinical level of care that might be needed to help treat and reduce such symptoms.

With our staff of subject matter experts, combined with survivors who are peer support specialists, TAPS offers a range of immediate services allowing survivors to find a stable, healthy path to healing and ultimately allowing them to create and establish a new life after loss—a concept referred to as posttraumatic growth. A powerful example of this is the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, which began in 2009. This annual event has given thousands of survivors of suicide loss the healthy coping skills and encouragement to begin a path toward healing for themselves as well as their families.

*I went to the Suicide Survivors Seminar in October for the first time. It was 5 months after my husband Tim died and it was probably one of the hardest and most emotional experiences I chose to do. However, it felt good to be around people who were understanding, compassionate and who had an idea of how I felt and what I was going through. I am very thankful for TAPS, as their resources have been some of the most helpful things I have found since Tim died. ~ Melanie Spotts, Surviving spouse of Timothy Spotts, US Navy Veteran*







Postvention care can address some of the most significant issues facing those bereaved by suicide, and it can be beneficial for survivors to understand some of the concepts that might be helpful in stabilizing their grief, such as issues which might include (but are not limited to) knowing that:

**Your life has changed forever.** Survivors are forced to cope with the unimaginable. You might sense a loss of control, trust, and safety. This is a lot to handle alone, and we are here to help you through it.

**Suicide grief is different.** There are issues related to suicide loss that can complicate the grieving process, like trauma, changes in support systems, trying to understand why this happened, and struggling with how to talk about the death. This is an important time to focus on your own well-being and care, as well as that of those around you.

**Grief can be a confusing and complex process.** There are ups and downs, good days and bad, when you will likely experience overwhelming feelings. Most of us feel unprepared for how to cope with such loss. Processing our grief often requires patience, hard work, and guidance. TAPS provides tools and resources needed to help you navigate this journey.

**Grief and trauma are two different things.** While grief is a natural reaction to loss, the traumatic exposure often associated with suicide can be one of the biggest barriers to moving forward in the process of grieving a suicide loss. Trauma can and should be treated separately from grief. We can help you deal with both.

**Your emotions are valid.** Everyone responds to loss differently. Seeking personal and professional support is a critical component of the healing process so that you can process and express your emotions in healthy ways that work for you.

**Open communication is paramount when discussing suicide.** For example, children process suicide loss differently than adults. When talking with children about suicide, it's important to establish a foundation of safety and trust. Honest dialogue can reduce risk and save lives. Our staff has personal experience and specialized training to aid you in this delicate and sensitive process.

Based on the development of best-practice TAPS Suicide Postvention Model® and related programs and services for survivors, TAPS has also been an influential leader in external, out-facing suicide prevention and postvention initiatives. This includes partnerships with both national and international organizations, board representation on task forces, specialty committees, and other advocacy platforms (such as with American Association of Suicidology, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention) and thought leadership among national policy discussion and legislation related to military suicide (such as with the Defense Suicide Prevention Office and the Department of Veterans Affairs). Our Suicide Prevention and Postvention team offers subject matter expertise in areas of public messaging (such as with Op Eds and media statements in response to high profile suicides), specialty trainings and webinars on topics of prevention, intervention, and postvention, consultations with organizations in the military, public, and private sectors, and as major contributors to the field of suicidology.

## TAPS offers a range of programming and resources to care for you in your time of need:

- TAPS Military Survivor Helpline: 24/7 support at 800-959-TAPS (8277)
- Survivor Care Team: Outreach and engagement by TAPS staff, many of whom are survivors of suicide loss
- National Peer Mentor Support Network: Trained volunteers providing peer-based support
- Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp: Annual healing event for adults and children since 2009
- Casework: Assistance navigating benefits, burials, records, financial and legal issues, etc.
- Online Community: Message boards, blogs, and chats moderated by TAPS staff
- TAPS Magazine: Articles about suicide by TAPS survivors, staff, and experts
- Counseling referrals: Connections to a network of grief and trauma specialists for adults and children
- Resource Kits: Customized care package of suicide-specific literature and other materials
- Community Resources: Customized list of local support groups, grief centers, children's resources, etc.

If you or someone you know has lost a loved one to suicide who served in the U.S. Armed Forces, regardless of duty status, we are here to help. Call 800-959-TAPS (8277) or visit [www.taps.org/suicide](http://www.taps.org/suicide).

If you, or someone you know, may be struggling with thoughts of suicide, please seek immediate help by: calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 (Veterans press 1) or 911, texting the Crisis Text Line at 741741, or visit the nearest emergency room.

# THE HARTWELL FOUNDATION

## *Supporting TAPS Kids*



The Hartwell Foundation began a search to find the charity doing the best work for military families, and especially for children who have lost a loved one who served in our country's military.

The foundation embarked on a 12-month listening and learning tour. They met with countless organizations, asked probing questions, and checked financial records. The Board had one recommendation – the Hartwell Foundation should support the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. The Hartwell Foundation saw the incredible support, care, and comfort TAPS provides all those grieving a military loss, but it was the Good Grief Camps that really aligned with Hartwell's mission to invest in projects that “directly benefit the health and well-being of children of the United States.”

Every child that has attended a TAPS Good Grief Camp or Camp Out has benefited from the incredible gifts that, since 2012, amount to over \$3.5 million from The Hartwell Foundation.

In addition to monetary support, TAPS also benefits from their involvement in our programs. They provide sound advice and look for other opportunities for TAPS

engagement and outreach. This includes the creative spark and subsequent funding for two public service advertisements which are bringing awareness and contributions to TAPS and connecting us with new survivors.

*"We are so grateful to our partnership with The Hartwell Foundation, said Bonnie Carroll, TAPS Founder and President, "They are providing a safe space for our TAPS children to have fun, share their stories of love and loss; learn ways to cope with their grief, and find healing in their shared experiences. Thank you for partnering with us on the life-saving mission to care for the children of our military heroes."*

The Hartwell Foundation also provides emergency support through the TAPS Hartwell Economic Fund for Children. Working through our Casework Team, they help the children of military survivors with desperate financial needs. Very often, they are helping to keep the electricity turned on or allowing the family to stay in their home by providing these short-term grants.

The Hartwell Foundation was founded in 1997 with the serious mission of helping children. The Hartwell Foundation's founder built SASCO, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary as one of the leading commercial electrical, data and systems contractors in the United States. He takes a very paternal interest in our TAPS children and is keenly involved in making certain TAPS has the resources needed to provide best-in-practice programming to support the children of our military heroes.

TAPS is grateful to the Hartwell Foundation for partnering with us to provide care and resources for our youngest military survivors. ★



# TAPS Online Store

taps.org/shop



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2.



3.



4.

SAVE 25%  
Lapis Jewelry  
USE CODE  
TAPSEAM25



5.



6.

- 1. Buff Multi-functional Headwear - \$24
- 2. Gold Plated Cufflinks - \$39
- 3. TAPS SNAP-IN™ Cord Organizer - 3 for \$10
- 4. Silver Heart Bracelet - \$45
- 5. Lapis Teardrop Earrings - \$49
- 6. TAPS Crew Socks - \$12
- 7. TAPS Logo Necktie - \$26
- 8. TAPS Vintage Trucker Hat - \$29
- 9. TAPS Fan Bracelet - \$5
- 10. Living Legacy Baseball Tee - \$25
- 11. Women's Stay the Course Tank Top Grey/Yellow - \$25
- 12. Love Lives On Women's Muscle Tee - \$25
- 13. Angels Watching Over Me V-Neck Tee - \$20
- 14. Women's Performance Polo Shirt - \$30



7.



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14.

# We Are Here for You!

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to all those grieving the death of a military loved one.

THIS AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE OUTLINES SOME OF THE WAYS TAPS PROVIDES COMPASSIONATE CARE



## **National Military Survivor Helpline**

Grief doesn't follow a schedule, and often some of the loneliest moments come at night, on weekends, holidays or even in the middle of a busy day. Our Helpline is answered live by TAPS at all times – 24/7/365 – with comfort and care from peer professionals who ensure the caller has open access to all that TAPS provides, including casework, peer support, community based resources and more. Whether you have an emotional crisis, need to connect with TAPS resources, find information or want to connect with someone and share, the TAPS Helpline is here for you. Call **800-959-TAPS (8277)**.

## **Peer Mentor Network**

Survivors helping survivors – that is the foundation of TAPS. Through our peer mentor network, you will have a supportive companion as you navigate

the aftermath of loss. Survivors who are at least 18 months beyond their loss volunteer their time and receive training to be a supportive presence for new survivors – offering a listening ear and a source of encouragement to the newly bereaved. You can share with someone who has also experienced military loss and find strength and hope knowing you are not alone. Peer Mentors also lend support at TAPS events throughout the year. Find out more: [taps.org/peermentors](https://taps.org/peermentors).

## **Casework Assistance**

Managing paperwork and unexpected needs that may arise can add to the weight of grief and loss. Our casework team delivers compassionate assistance for all the needs a family may have, including access to pro bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, information on state and federal benefits, and connections to

private social services support. Find out more: [taps.org/casework](https://taps.org/casework).

## **Education Support Services**

Need guidance for post-secondary education scholarship and benefit information? Our education support coordinators can work with you to access to resources and provide you with tools to help you step confidently toward your education goals. Find out more: [taps.org/edu](https://taps.org/edu).

## **Connections to Grief Counseling and Local Support Groups**

TAPS provides connection to free and unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources and local support groups. We can assist in finding the right grief counselor to help you develop coping skills, work through questions and navigate the myriad of emotions associated with grief and loss. We also rely on a large network of strong



community partners to help locate support groups in your community. We perform careful research and compile resources that provide a source of support close to home. Find out more: [taps.org/griefcounseling](http://taps.org/griefcounseling).

**Suicide Loss Support**

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

**Connect Online**

The TAPS Online Community offers the ability to connect you with other survivors from the comfort of home. Wherever you are within your grief you can find support, encouragement and

learn how others are coping with loss. Video and text chat sessions, message boards, blogs, weekly communications and peer-based sharing groups give you a variety of ways to strengthen your support network. You can participate at your comfort level – actively share or just listen/read the input of others and know that you are not alone. Find out more: [taps.org/onlinecommunity](http://taps.org/onlinecommunity).

**Youth/Young Adult Programs**

Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health and education, TAPS youth programs - including Good Grief Camps, summer campouts, teen adventures and family retreats – provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing. Activities and programs have also been developed for young adults (ages 18-25) based on personal and career development, financial stability, communication and service to others. Young adults strengthen bonds and build solid foundations as they move into adulthood. Find out more: [taps.org/youthprograms](http://taps.org/youthprograms).

**Toxic Exposure Loss Support**

TAPS is leading the effort to ensure families whose loved one died from toxic exposure are recognized, cared for and aware of all benefits they are eligible to

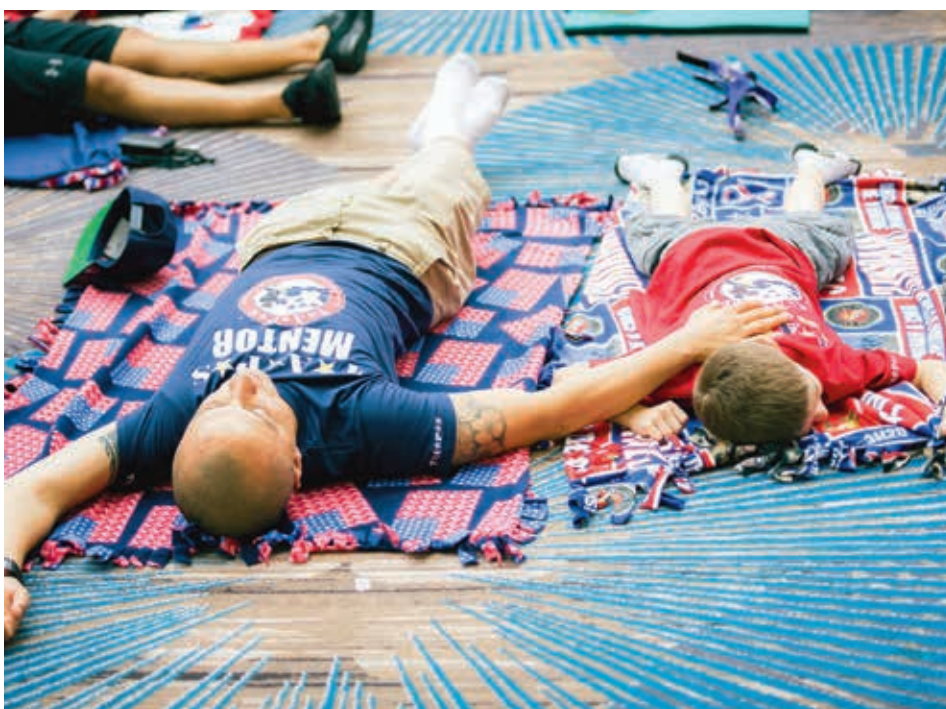
receive. Working to increase education about risks and effects of toxic exposure, raise awareness and help families navigate the benefits process after loss, TAPS will pull together relevant legislation, medical studies, expert testimonies, literature and reports to create a reference manual and a foundation for future advocacy. Find out more: Email [info@taps.org](mailto:info@taps.org).

**Institute for Hope and Healing**

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

**Publications**

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



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

To learn more about the support waiting for you from your TAPS family, visit our website at [taps.org](http://taps.org) or call the Helpline anytime at 800-959-TAPS(8277).



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.



**TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS**

3033 Wilson Boulevard, Third Floor  
Arlington, VA 22201

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**IF YOU'RE A SURVIVOR OF SUICIDE LOSS, TAPS HAS A SPECIAL PLACE FOR YOU.**

JOIN YOUR

*TAPS*  
*family*

AT THE

**2019 NATIONAL  
MILITARY SUICIDE  
SURVIVOR SEMINAR**

**OCTOBER 11-14  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

At the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, you'll meet other people walking the same road — suicide loss survivors from across the country who come to share stories, struggles, moments of reflection and loving support.

Find strength in knowing you are not alone as we celebrate the lives of our loved ones. Find out more at [taps.org/nmsss](https://taps.org/nmsss).



PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES