

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



Sharing the Journey

VOLUME 19 • ISSUE 4

TAPS Magazine is dedicated to the brave men and women who died while serving in the Armed Forces, and to their survivors. The magazine is written by surviving family members, friends, and care-giving professionals. We hope you will find comfort, support, information, inspiration, and a sense of connection within its pages.

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501(c)3 Veterans Service Organization which publishes *TAPS Magazine* in furtherance of its mission to provide support services to the survivors of service members who have died while serving.

TAPS Magazine is published quarterly and sent free of charge to survivors, their friends and family, service members, and professionals who work with U.S. military survivors.



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TAPS®

Comfort and Support Since 1994

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to anyone grieving the death of a loved one in military service to America, regardless of their relationship to the deceased or the circumstances of the death.

TAPS is here for you
24 hours a day
7 days a week

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



SUPPORTS the bereaved survivor through a network of peer mentors. Mentors are trained volunteers who have also lost a loved one in the Armed Forces and are now standing ready to reach out and support others.

PROVIDES the National Military Survivor Helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 800-959-TAPS (8277). Support is available from leading experts in the field of grief and trauma.

HOSTS the TAPS Online Community of survivors, providing secure chat rooms, message boards, blogs, peer group discussion sites, and an extensive website at www.taps.org.

SPONSORS Military Survivor Seminars and Retreats for adults and Good Grief Camps for young survivors in locations across America, giving survivors the opportunity to share, grow, and help each other heal.

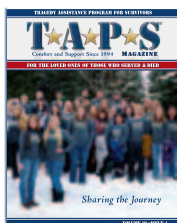
CONNECTS survivors to resources in their local communities and provides grief and trauma resources and information.

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COVER PHOTO BY
Erin Jacobson

TAPS siblings share the journey at a sibling retreat in Alaska, 2013



You are cordially invited to attend
**TAPS 20TH NATIONAL
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Let Us Hear From You



We want to know your thoughts, perspectives, and opinions on TAPS programs and publications. Tell us what you think, send ideas for future topics, or submit an article. Submission guidelines can be found online at www.taps.org. Your TAPS family is waiting to hear from you. ★

American/Israeli Grief Camp

It has been a week and one day since we returned to our home base here, outside Tel Aviv. There's a famous Israeli book, later a film, called *Someone to Run With*. In Hebrew, someone to run with is a phrase used to describe a partner to your journey that makes it easier, someone who morally supports you and helps you through hard times in life. In our group's journey, TAPS was someone to run with. And the kids understood that immediately, despite the lingual and cultural differences, despite the short length of our interaction. We were able to connect hearts of so many people and create a magical moment which I believe we will all carry with us for many years.

Shlomi Nahumson, Israel
 Director of Youth Programs, IDF
 Widows & Orphans Organization

Chicago Siblings Retreat

Special thanks to all organizers and supporters of TAPS. I just returned from the Chicago Siblings Retreat and it was amazing! You are the best! I now have a whole new TAPS family of brothers and sisters. Thanks for the life-changing and special experience.

Kerry Ferguson, California
 Surviving sister of
 SSG Casey Grochowiak

U.S. Air Force Marathon

I just wanted to thank you for everything this weekend. It was such an amazing experience and I am so excited about the marathon and Team Michael Deal's contribution to TAPS. I cannot stop thinking about how positive and healing the experience was. Between the training, the fundraising, and the marathon itself, I feel a rejuvenation and peacefulness I haven't felt since Michael died. It is powerful. TAPS was a huge part of my marathon journey.

Michelle Pasko, Pennsylvania
 Surviving sister of
 SSgt Michael Deal

Camp Pendleton Seminar

This seminar was out of my comfort zone because it encompassed all military deaths, regardless of cause. Previously I had only attended seminars focusing on my loved one's manner of death—suicide. Now I know that TAPS seminar attendees embrace all military survivors. I expected that the staff would, but I was so gratified that the attendees were so open and embracing. I attribute that to the tone set and maintained by TAPS personnel.

Linda Beard, California
 Surviving mother of
 AD2 Daniel Beard

For the Long Haul

We became involved with TAPS at the beginning of our journey. I was a widow with three very, very small children. I was lost, to be honest. My husband died in 2003 and I lived in a bubble alone, with my grief and my children. I desperately wanted to know if there were others experiencing what I was and to see if they struggled with the same issues. I wanted to belong somewhere because our world had imploded on us. I now, through TAPS, have a large circle of people I call my friends. But they are fellow widows and sometimes feel more like family. Every time I am at an event with TAPS I feel "normal." It is the only place where my family and our normal fits everyone else's. I can't even explain how helpful this is in terms of grieving and "rebooting" to continue on.

Deborah May, Utah
 Surviving spouse of
 SSgt Donald May

TAPS Magazine

I want to thank you for all of your support. I read every single *TAPS Magazine* I'm sent and they have greatly helped me deal with my son's death. I really appreciate your support and prayers and look forward to seeing the new issue.

Robert Rast, Indiana
 Surviving father of
 HN Benjamin D. Rast



Holiday Expectations

By Margaret H. Gerner, MSW

All of us get caught up in expectations not only of what the holidays are supposed to be, but also in the roles we are supposed to play in those holidays. We're supposed to be joyful and happy at Christmas time. We're supposed to shop and decorate and prepare, and we're supposed to say and do the right things so that everyone around us enjoys the day. That's a big responsibility, isn't it?

But my question is: who said we have to do all this? Most of us just go through life doing what is expected of us, never questioning why we have to, or asking where our rights are in these expectations. [Editor's note: see Dr. Alan Wolfelt's "Mourner's Bill of Rights" on the following page.] We never stop and ask who fills our needs. I think it's time we do. We have enough to do, attending to our grief and

doing the really necessary things in life, without allowing ourselves to take on the responsibilities that everyone else puts on us, too.

Because we have conformed to everyone's expectations of us for so long, we don't see any other way to do things. What we need to do is stand up and say, "I can't do it this year. I'm sorry if you object, but I have to meet my needs this holiday," and ignore the repercussions that might follow. I am not suggesting that we abandon our families or friends to do only what we want on the special days, but I am suggesting that we do whatever we possibly can to make these days easier for ourselves and not be concerned with what others think about it.

In a booklet titled "Acceptance," Vincent P. Collins put it quite succinctly: "I caused myself a lot of unnecessary grief by trying to be unselfish, to think of everybody else first, myself last, and to try to please everybody. But you can't please everybody. You can wear yourself out doing this and that and the other thing to please your cousins and your sisters and your aunts, and you find out that they are not really affected one way or the other. 'Please everybody, nobody's pleased; please yourself, at least you're pleased!'

Charity begins at home, and enlightened self-interest is a basic endowment of human nature.

You can save yourself a lot of grief by admitting the futility of trying to please everybody or of trying to please somebody who just can't be pleased."

I think this applies to us as bereaved people, not only at the holiday season, but all the time. Ask yourself if you must torment and exhaust yourself

this year just to please someone else. What about pleasing yourself for a change?

After all, when the day is over and Aunt Mary (or whoever) is in a tiff because you were "morbid" and talked about how you missed your spouse or hung your dead child's Christmas stocking, they will get over it in a week or so, but you will still be grieving.

The fact is that we must take care of ourselves, because few of us are fortunate enough to have a supportive group of relatives and friends around us who will encourage the self-preserving stance we must have in order to get through the holidays without terrible memories of "that day." Let's protect ourselves with a little assertiveness. ★



About the Author



Margaret Gerner is a bereaved mother, grandmother, and sibling. She holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Missouri at Columbia and has worked in the field of bereavement for more than 25 years. She has written extensively for The Compassionate Friends (TCF) and Bereaved Parents USA (BPUSA) and has worked with both organizations to help other bereaved parents learn healthy ways of coping with grief.

The Mourner's Bill of Rights

By Alan Wolfelt, PhD

As a bereaved person, you have certain rights that others must not take away from you. In fact, it is the very upholding of these rights that makes healing possible.

1 You have the right to experience your own unique grief.

No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. Don't allow others to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.

2 You have the right to talk about your grief.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief.

3 You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.

Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Know that there is no such thing as a "wrong" emotion. Accept all your feelings and find listeners who will do the same.

4 You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

5 You have the right to experience "griefbursts."

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

6 You have the right to make use of ritual.

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. Later rituals, such as lighting a candle for the person who died, can also be healing touchstones. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

7 You have the right to embrace your spirituality.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

8 You have the right to search for meaning.

You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.

9 You have the right to treasure your memories.

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find creative ways to embrace them.

10 You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.

Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever. *

About the Author



Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a respected author and educator on the topic of healing in grief. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School's Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt has written many compassionate, best selling books designed to help people mourn well, so they can continue to love and live well. For a complete listing and to learn more about the natural and necessary process of grief and mourning, visit www.centerforloss.com.

Rock On

By Michele Hiester Marcum, surviving sister of MSG Michael T. Hiester

When I was about three years old, I received a diminutive barrel-back rocker for Christmas from my aunt and uncle. Secured against the bottom runner was a little music box that would play a tinny melody with each forward motion. And when I rocked back, the music stopped. I don't remember what my brother received that year, but I'm certain it paled in comparison to the significance of my gift. I loved that little chair, and when I left home to start my own family, it traveled with me.

The year my daughter turned two, I had her picture taken with that little heirloom, thereby doubling the sentimental value for me. Of course, she isn't sitting in it but rather escaping it, forever captured in print with an obvious "no" on her lips. As long as there was no camera around, she spent hours rocking in that chair during her toddler years, creating her own melody with the rocking motion.

Many years later, I had that oaken treasure refinished by a dear family member, who lost a short but valiant battle with cancer shortly thereafter. At the time of refinishing, she didn't yet know that she was ill,

and I'm thankful to have a piece of her talent to remember her by.

It is mystifying to me that an inanimate object can hold such a special place in my heart. That rocker may have been just an ordinary gift for a rambunctious toddler long ago, but today, it tells so much of my life story. When I look at it now, I hear the music and feel the love of my paternal family. I remember my daughter as a little girl and sigh at the memory of such an independent spirit so early on. I see, in the even staining and sanded edges, the handiwork of the sweet lady who spent her life rescuing and restoring antiques. And I remember those sacred holidays

spent with my brother before he died in a land far away and our Christmases lost their "Merry."

Memories are like that. Little moments that come and go with no great significance—until much later when you realize that they mean everything.

On several occasions throughout my adolescent education, I remember teachers asking us to write about our earliest childhood memories. Invariably, the vast majority of the class would write about the holidays, and more specifically, about Christmas. We would remember a certain toy we received, or something humorous a family member did, or a tradition that had taken root way back then. The significance of those writing experiences somehow escaped me until I became an adult. We don't remember things; we remember the feelings attached to them. Our pencils may have been telling the printed tale of perfect gifts, but our hearts were writing in joy-infused cursive about the emotion wrapped within.

The truth is, there really is a magical quality about the holiday season. When you're not grieving, that is. Whether you celebrate Christmas or another tradition during the dark month of December, there's a spirit of hope and renewal that lifts its wings as the month presses on. It's as though the memories scattered at your feet chase after you throughout the thirty-one days. Even when traditions change abruptly, the memories linger.



It is mystifying to me that an inanimate object can hold such a special place in my heart. That rocker may have been just an ordinary gift for a rambunctious toddler long ago, but today, it tells so much of my life story.

If you have recently said goodbye to your loved one, then you might be thinking at this point that I have spent just a touch too long, wistfully shaking snow globes. (And you might be right!) I admit, holidays have lost their luster, and sorrow has sucked the joy from my soul, too. Christmas just isn't what it used to be, and it will never be what I had hoped.

Michael's death shattered my world. Quite literally, the music just stopped. There was nothing joyous or spontaneous or beautiful anymore. The silence was beyond deafening. It was eerie and depressing. And suffocating. The only music I could hear was the haunting echo of Taps and the chilling squeal of the bagpipes that accompanied Michael's burial.

My first holiday after Michael's death was raw and painful. I couldn't bear to listen to the carols or look at holiday advertising. I barely tolerated bell ringers at store entrances, and I wanted to scream at shoppers who sat out all night on Thanksgiving evening just so they could be the first to have a meaningless possession. Didn't they know what was really important? Everything made me cry, and it hurt too much to even think about our childhood memories, let alone attempt to continue the traditions.

The next Christmas was different. Not easier. Just different. I cried a little less and smiled a little more. I braved the legendary Black Friday shopping day, but my heart wasn't in it. I didn't care if I bought anything or scored any bragging rights on landing an amazing deal. I could tolerate the Christmas carols, but I could only mouth the words. I couldn't give voice to the meaning.

This will be our ninth Christmas without Michael, and I've noticed that the music has returned once again. It's a different song, a lower pitch, a slower tempo. But I hear the music again. The tears sometimes still surprise me at the most unexpected times, but they're more of joy than of sorrow.



I bought that second rocker, not because I needed it but because it reminded me of Michael. Two rockers that tell a story. One with the melody of my youth, and one with the silence that grief drags in.

Photos courtesy of Michele Hiester Marcum

The memories flood my soul and have nowhere to go but down my cheeks.

A few years ago, I happened upon a slightly larger version of my childhood rocker. The same curved back, the same tapered runners, the same glossy sheen. The seat is in far better condition, and it would certainly support more weight, but there is no music box. Just a simple rocker. Not having the space for it in my home, and not having any logical use for it, I did what made sense to me at the time: I bought it. It's currently sitting in my attic, beside the first one. No one outside of my family knows it's there, but I do. And it makes my heart smile.

I don't know if Michael ever even sat in that original rocker at all. But to me, it doesn't matter. That little rocker reminds me of a time in my life when my brother was full of life. An infant, a toddler, a young boy, a man... a husband and father. Always a son. Always my brother. Always beside me.

And the larger rocker? I can't really explain why I bought it. I simply don't have a logical explanation. But I love it. And I love that it

doesn't have the music box that the original version does. It's a good reminder that sometimes silence is just as important as any other melody. Sometimes the music really does stop... and that's okay. We lose our rhythm, stop moving, and are just still. That's a part of the healing. When we begin moving, begin to get back into our old/new self, the music will begin again. Eventually.

Depending on the pace of our new-found lives, the music will sound different. Slower or faster. Sweeter or with more bass. Louder or softer. A simple melody or four part harmony. A gentle lullaby or a frenzied techno number. Perhaps we'll need earplugs to tolerate the sound we create...at least until we settle on the right rhythm and volume.

I bought that second rocker, not because I needed it but because it reminded me of Michael. Two rockers that tell a story. One with the melody of my youth, and one with the silence that grief drags in. Both will go by my tree this year, because they remind me of us as kids, side by side, still rocking on. *

Is Winter Paradise in Disguise?

By Darcie Sims, PhD, CHT, CT, GMS

There ought to be a law! There ought to be a law against snow and ice and winter. There ought to be a law against snow drifting across the back door and one against ice forming on the sidewalks after I've shoveled. There ought to be a law against 40 below and frozen peas (they have nothing to do with winter, but there should be a law against peas anyway).

There should be laws to protect the average citizen from wind chill and frozen door locks. We should not have to endure the fury of Mother Nature when she loses her temper and tosses snowflakes against the windowpanes. We should not have to cope in winter. Everyone should be able to hibernate from November to April. No one should have to work or think or hurt during those months when everything else is smart enough to stay asleep. Why is mankind still awake?

Winter always comes as a surprise to me. I think I should be onto winter but it always brings a few tricks to keep me on my toes. I have spent winters in the frozen north (like now), winters basking on beaches in the Caribbean, winters slogging through rain in the swamps of Louisiana, and winters being blown around on the Midwest prairies. But, never before has my Jell-O frozen on the way to the potluck!

I've been around a long time and I know the ebb and flow in winter, when the earth sleeps and the waters lie solid beneath the blanket of snow. I've learned to ski, to skate, to sled, and to make soup. We've crafted until we ran out of room and friends and then we discovered books and the computer. We've refinished furniture bought in the fall when it seemed like a good idea. We've learned to square dance and to play bridge and we've cleaned house until it should be spring. But nothing

prepared me for frozen Jell-O and the bitterness of this winter. Nothing.

Why now? Why now after so many years, did winter send its full blast across my face? Why does it snow more on this side of the street than over there? Why does the snow plow raise its blade at my driveway instead of next door? Why did winter pick on me this year?

Maybe because we're in a new place. Or maybe it's because we've been in an old place far too long. Maybe winter decided to stir things up and cause us to shake out the cobwebs. Maybe we had grown too smug and complacent in our life. Maybe this winter we needed a wakeup call.

Perhaps we had let winter and its iciness become too familiar and too routine. Perhaps we needed to be reminded of the challenges that snow and grief bring. Maybe we needed to learn to "Chain up" and "Be Prepared" again. We had been

WINTER... perhaps it is Mother Nature's way of inviting us to live through the pain to get to the other side, that place where memory doesn't hurt and the magic of love warms us from the inside.



drifting for a long time—existing but not really living—functioning but not really feeling. It had grown familiar, like an old shoe and so, maybe we needed this winter's blast to get us moving again.

Maybe, but there ought to be a law...is Mother Nature monitoring our grief? Does she notice when we fail to grasp the joy in the little moments? Does she despair when we let the beauty of her landscaping go unnoticed? Is Mother Nature sad when we hurry everywhere, intent upon solutions but missing the questions completely? Is winter her way of slowing us down and inviting us to walk more carefully through her world?

In winter, creatures turn to each other for warmth and comfort. Is this blizzard a reminder to us to stay inside, to seek out each other for company, entertainment, and comfort? Did Mother Nature invent winter just to remind us to cuddle...if not each other, then ourselves? Were we rushing too quickly through autumn to stop and celebrate her turning leaves?

Were we hurrying through our lives, searching for the peace we dream of, but missing the moments along the way? Is winter the season of despair or the season when we must confront our sadness because we are snowbound and can't escape the icy fingers of grief? Is winter the time when life slows to a mushy pace, when the heart is heavy with memory and the steps no longer seem to carry us any place warm?

Winter keeps coming because we simply have not moved to a warmer climate, but we can't until we have endured it all.

We cannot move to the warmer places until we have struggled to shovel the walk, start the car and become respectful of the progress of birth, life, death and rebirth again and again. Winter comes until we understand that death only takes the arms we long to hold, the voice we strain to hear, the face we see so clearly. Winter cannot take the love that melts the heart and warms the secret, inside places. Even though winter comes, love endures long past the icy blasts of death.

Love paints the sky with sunshine and cradles the aching heart and fills the empty arms. We did love and so we shall again... in some other place, some other time. But only if we learn to slip and slide across the icy spots of our grief and practice falling and getting up again and again and again.

There is a purpose to winter. It is that time when the earth slows and the days grow short so we huddle inside, safe against the icy blasts. Winter is that time when we allow memory to rise to the surface and we must claim and confront our fears, our aches, our hurts, our grief. We've run out of places to hide. Grief finds us no matter where we are in winter. It is time to live through this part of the journey too.

So, bundle up, lay in a good supply of chocolate and tissues, and let the memories skate across your mind. Curl up with the

scrapbooks, put on the music, and let the tears flow. Claim it all, for we have earned it all. We could not understand light if we had not known dark. We could not sing sweet if we had not tasted bitter. We could not laugh if we had not cried.

Winter...perhaps it is Mother Nature's way of inviting us to live through the pain to get to the other side, that place where memory doesn't hurt and the magic of love warms us from the inside. Drift away to those moments of paradise, when love was full and the heart knew no past, present, or future. It is and was ours to hold. It will be again—someday—but only if we let winter come and learn its lessons of time spent in the memory place. We cannot hide. It is time to remember and experience again the depth of love given and received.

Is winter paradise in disguise? Perhaps it is, but no one should have to endure frozen Jell-O... *



About the Author



Dr. Darcie Sims is a bereaved parent and child, nationally certified thanatologist, certified pastoral bereavement specialist, and licensed psychotherapist and hypnotherapist. She is the president and cofounder of Grief, Inc., a grief consulting business, and the Director of the American Grief Academy in Seattle, Washington. Darcie is an internationally recognized speaker and writer, having authored seven books and numerous articles. She currently serves as the Director of Training and Certification for TAPS. For more information and a complete listing of her books, visit www.griefinc.com.

Coping with the Holidays Advice from TAPS Survivors

Sometimes people expect us to plaster a smile on our faces and go about the holidays as if nothing were wrong. They don't understand that every day is a challenge for us, especially in the early years and especially during the winter holiday season. Here are some honest observations from TAPS survivors about coping with the holidays. Although we may have different faith backgrounds and different relationships to our loved one, we can still find strength in each other and hope for this coming holiday season.

Ashley Deason

★ Surviving sister of Mike ★

Christmas of 2005 was the last time I saw my brother while he was on R&R leave from Iraq. It was also his favorite time of the year. He loved everything about it—the food, presents, movies, and snow. After he died, I couldn't imagine “celebrating” his favorite time of the year without him here so I made every excuse not to be home. Last year was my first Christmas Day at home with my parents since 2006. We watched *Christmas Vacation*, a movie we

Although we may have different faith backgrounds and different relationships to our loved one, we can still find strength in each other and hope for this coming holiday season.

watched each year together as a family. In the back of my mind, I could hear Mike's laugh as we watched it, and it made me smile. We went to Mike's grave—which my parents had decorated weeks before with a wreath, tree, and flowers—held hands, and said a prayer.

Leslie Blei

★ Surviving mother of Eugene ★

This is our second Chanukah and second birthday (he was born December 20) without him. I found that making new memories and doing the holidays differently helped. The pain doesn't go away; you just learn to cope better. I would suggest you think of some funny stories about your loved one, tell one, and have each person there tell something fun about your loved one as well. That way your loved one is included. You need to remember that you are not the only one suffering.

Rose Bargo

★ Surviving spouse of Troy ★

This will be the second holiday season that my husband was not here physically to celebrate holidays with us. I don't think about him as dead; I think of him as deployed. I know it sounds crazy, but this helped me get through my first holiday without him. I also

wear my t-shirt with my husband's picture on it. That makes me feel he's with me everywhere I go. My bedroom is filled with my husband's pictures, and sometimes I talk to his picture, and I wrote letters to him which told him of our everyday life. It helps me go through every day, the holidays past, and holidays that are coming.

Bill Smith

★ Surviving father of Brandon ★

Our family is on its second Christmas now and missing our precious hero. It took a year for the intense grief to die down, knowing he is one of God's angels watching over us. I believe that when he feels us in pain, he hurts for us. We would never do anything to cause him unrest, only love! The memories help us cope with the holidays. Brandon loved Christmas.

Mary-Ann McLendon

★ Surviving mother of Blake ★

This is my third Christmas without our Blake. I've been able to go through the motions a little smoother than the last two years. The first year is a blur. I really don't know how I managed to do what had to be done. Last year was not quite as intense as the first. This year tears still pop up along the way. But I keep hoping the day will come when I will feel the true love, joy, and happiness of the season again. I want to. It just hasn't happened yet. Maybe next year.



Sarah Coast

★ Surviving twin of Robbie ★

My twin brother Robbie died in May 2002, so by Christmas I still didn't feel much like celebrating. My son kept asking me to put up a tree. So I pulled it all out, not expecting to see all the ornaments that Robbie and I had made, and it was a flood of memories. I remember looking at the ornaments and thinking that he had once touched these, and it suddenly occurred to me that I couldn't put those on the tree without Robbie there. I cried and then I decided that I just needed to buy all new ornaments, which we did. I bought an ornament in honor of Robbie, and each year, we have continued the tradition for ten years.

Deb Bonn

★ Surviving mother of Beth ★

This is our sixth holiday season without Beth. It is especially difficult to experience the holiday at home, so this will be the second year that we spend the holiday in Virginia at our son's house. For me, it is much easier not being home. I've been able to bake cookies and cook the dinner in Virginia with little emotional upheaval. Last year was the first year that I wrapped presents.

Pam Lewis

★ Surviving mother of Joe ★

Our precious Joe was killed November 17, so Thanksgiving is tough for us. This year we opted to spend it here at home with just my daughter and her family and my daughter-in-law and granddaughter, rather than having a huge day at my sister's with all the extended family. I still haven't the motivation to put up a tree. That was my and Joe's job. I have to figure out a new way of doing things. And that is the key. Your old way is gone. Holidays are different now. Everything is different. So, you keep the traditions that you can handle and you make new ones. I'm three years out and the pain isn't quite as raw every day. I'm not saying that there aren't crying days; there still are. Just not as many.

Jeanne Weaver

★ Surviving mother of Todd ★

This year, the third without Todd, I found I had more traditional Christmas spirit. Yet as I write this I realize that, as with the past two years, tears have streamed down my face daily. Perhaps they always will. Christmas—a time of light, hope, and joy—is changed forever in my life. The tree went up earlier than ever this year, and the outside of the house is highly decorated with lights—lights for Todd. Todd loved Christmas outdoor lighting. He loved everything about Christmas. New traditions have been added to our Christmas. As always, we go to Christmas Eve service. But now on Christmas morning we drive three hours to Arlington National Cemetery and spend the morning with Todd, bringing his favorite gingerbread. Then we travel to share Christmas with his siblings and our grandchildren.

Andi Ralyea

★ Surviving sister of Jon ★

That first year, I hoped Christmas wouldn't come. I can't even remember Thanksgiving, but I'm sure it was spent sitting around the table with just the thought of what was missing rather than what was there. Having a small child, I did what I had to do to make that Christmas the best I possibly could. But all I could think of was the time I had with my brother and would never have again. As the years have passed, I no longer dread the holidays. Each year, Jon is represented with a new ornament on our tree. He may not physically be here, but he is still very much part of our family. While I can't reminisce with him about when we got our first Nintendo or built the giant snow fort, I can tell my son those tales, and they continue to live on. The holidays will never be the same, but we've learned to grow and adapt with our changing version of normal. ★



Why the Holidays Hurt

Coping with the Reality of Those Special Days

By Richard J. Obershaw, MSW, LICSW

FIRST HOLIDAY WITHOUT ALCOHOL HOLIDAY MUSIC FAMILY REUNIONS REGRESSION EXHAUSTION SELF-CENTEREDNESS IN A TIME OF SELFLESSNESS RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS EXPECTATIONS OF THE "OLD ME" SADNESS IN A TIME OF JOY

People who are grieving fear holidays. Holidays can be times when they have to face more than their wounded emotions can bear. Why is grief more acute during the holidays? What follows are some of the reasons holidays can make grief more painful. None of these reasons alone may cause undue pressure, but two or three together can be enough to overwhelm a grieving person.

REGRESSION

Holiday celebrations commemorate the past. Those who celebrate mark and remember past events. Some events may be from our lifetime, some may be hundreds or thousands of years old. We eat a meal in remembrance of the shared feast between Indians and Pilgrims, or in remembrance of a journey out of bondage. We light a menorah or an evergreen tree. We remember the accomplishments of a martyred civil rights leader or of great American presidents. We salute an American flag, watch fireworks, or place a wreath on a veteran's grave. All of these practices and traditions cause us to look back, to regress in our thoughts to an earlier time.

Grief, too, is a regressive event. It can cause people to regress psychologically. Grieving children will often regress to more child-like behaviors, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, and baby talk. Adults may

find comfort in being held, rocked, or patted by those offering sympathy. In severe grief, adults may even curl into a fetal position, a sign of ultimate regression. In a more general sense of regression, grief can force us to focus on the past rather than dealing with the present or preparing for the future.

Grieving adults fear the future because they are uncertain about what lies ahead; thus, they go back and think about their life before it changed, when things seemed safer. The past seems safer than the future simply because we know we have survived it. The future can be a terrifying unknown. When holiday remembrance and grief-related regression are combined, as they are during holidays, they can quickly spiral the bereaved down to new depths of grief, particularly if the holidays come soon after the loss.

SELF-CENTEREDNESS IN A TIME OF SELFLESSNESS

The holidays are a time to express our gratitude for what has been given to us, or sacrificed for us, to make our lives better. And they are a time to give to others. Solicitations from charities abound during the holidays.

Gifts are purchased and exchanged, food is given to others, volunteers feed the homeless, bell ringers remind us to drop money in the kettle for the less fortunate. For most of us, it feels good to give—but not for the bereaved.

Grief is selfish. The bereaved say "I have lost, and I hurt; I am lonely and confused. I need to get to know me again. I need to be comforted. I am angry. I am sad. I. I. I."

When we lose someone, we focus on ourselves —we tend to look inward rather than outward. The work of grieving is the work of re-identifying the self.



When we lose someone, we focus on ourselves—we tend to look inward rather than outward. The work of grieving is the work of re-identifying the self; thus, the bereaved are very self-centered.

The bereaved's self-centeredness collides with the holiday message of selflessness, which creates confusion and guilt. The bereaved often feel there is something wrong with them, because prior to their loss, they always felt good about giving during the holidays. Now they feel bad because they are unable to summon up the giving spirit. The loss of holiday spirit becomes yet another loss for the bereaved to cope with, making their grief even more painful.



Grief is not suspended during holidays. Nevertheless, the bereaved feel their sadness is out of place, and they feel left out of the celebration. They may miss the way they used to feel about the holiday.

are able once again to feel good about feeling good, they should take it as a sign that they are resolving their grief.

HOLIDAY MUSIC

Music brings back memories—memories that remind us of what was and can never be again. Music moves us; it penetrates the walls we have built around ourselves to protect us from the invasion of memories. During holidays, especially in December, music is everywhere: on the radio, on television specials, in churches, in retail stores, even on telephones while you wait on hold. The bereaved are unable to escape the music that stirs memories and emotions.

FAMILY REUNIONS

Holidays bring families together to celebrate according to the family's traditions. The support that a family gives to the bereaved can be of great solace. So, too, the lack of support from family can be a source of added pain for the bereaved. People move through the grieving process at their own pace. Without meaning to, those who are further along may expect the other family members to be where they are in the grieving process. Those who are taking more time may feel there is something wrong with them. Family members less affected by the loss may be less sympathetic and supportive to those who feel the loss more acutely. Lack of support during the holidays can cause the bereaved to feel abandoned by the ones they trust the most.

All of the politics of protection that exist within families come into play during holidays. The bereaved may avoid family reunions because they do not want the joyous occasion brought down by their sadness. Family members may avoid the bereaved because they fear they may exacerbate the pain.

Finally, people carry emotional baggage from childhood. All sorts of conflicts and unresolved issues from childhood are carried into adulthood. Family reunions bring the bereaved back together with those who let them down or caused them pain earlier in their lives. All these factors can accumulate and heighten the pain of grieving at family reunions and holiday get-togethers.

SADNESS IN A TIME OF JOY

Holidays are celebrations. Those who celebrate are supposed to be happy and joyous. The reality is that many are not. For many, a holiday is just another day of loneliness, pain, and fear.

Grief is not suspended during holidays. Nevertheless, the bereaved feel their sadness is out of place, and they feel left out of the celebration. They may miss the way they used to feel about the holiday. Even if a grieving person begins to have some fun during a holiday, such fun may have a negative result. Good feelings may cause the bereaved to feel guilty, and sad feelings quickly return. When the bereaved

RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS

Most holidays are also Holy Days and therefore have a religious and spiritual element. The religious aspect of holidays can be hard for the bereaved to accept. They often are angry with God during this time of loss and grief. The bereaved may feel abandoned by God and reluctant to participate in religious ceremonies. The death of a loved one can shake the deepest faith.

Bereaved persons may also feel abandoned by their faith community during holidays; they may feel that their fellow believers are not there for them when they need them most. After all, everyone is busy during the holidays. Also, the clergy person who leads the holiday services may be the same person who officiated at the funeral or provided pastoral counseling right after the loved one's death, so attending services may remind the bereaved of their loss.

All of the above may cause the hurting survivor to withdraw from the rituals, customs, support, and comfort that their religion once provided. Even worse, they may feel they are suffering another

Celebrations, customs, rituals, and people that once met the needs of the old self no longer seem to meet the needs of the emerging new self. The bereaved often feel confused during this time and vacillate between the “old me” and the “new me.”

major loss: the loss of faith. Thus, contrary to common wisdom, religious celebrations can sometimes add to holiday woe for the grieving.

FIRST HOLIDAY WITHOUT

Like other “firsts” that the bereaved must recognize and grieve for—the first night without the deceased, the first family get-together, the first meal alone in a restaurant—the first significant holidays must be recognized and grieved for. Important “firsts” loom large in their minds. They ask, often weeks ahead of the holiday, “How will I get through the holiday meal or the holiday prayer with the family?” The day itself is, of course, very difficult. The bereaved find themselves in familiar holiday situations doing familiar things, but without their loved one. Their loss becomes even more real.

“Firsts” are not only hard to look forward to and live through, but they are hard to look back on. Once completed, they represent the passage of another landmark on the calendar, and so underline the growing separation from the deceased.

ALCOHOL

Holidays call for celebration, and celebration often calls for alcohol. Because alcohol is a depressant, it is easy to understand why the bereaved should limit their drinking. Alcohol may give quick relief from anxiety, so when the bereaved feel they will be overcome by grief at the family gathering, they might overuse the quick-fix medicine of alcohol. Too much alcohol increases depression, which can cause more drinking.

The circle is vicious and can spin out of control.

Sometimes the bereaved discover that physical pain has a way of distracting one from emotional pain. Too much alcohol leads to nausea and other physical ailments. It is not unheard of for the grieving to drink to cause physical pain in order to distract themselves from emotional pain.

EXHAUSTION

There is much to do during holidays: cleaning the house, cooking the meals, preparing the table, decorating the house, baking the cookies, buying the food, sending the invitations, buying the gifts, planning ceremonies. The list goes on and on, and accomplishing all that needs to be done can be exhausting.

The job of grieving, by itself, is an exhausting task. The grieving person must not only strive to come to terms with the loss of their loved one, but also with all the little losses in their life that come with that greater loss. The mental work involved seems endless and is very hard. When the work of the holidays is combined with the task of grieving, the bereaved can feel overwhelmed. They may not have the energy to do either job, let alone both, during holidays.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE “OLD ME”

Grief work is also the work of identifying the new self, the self that will live on after suffering the loss of a loved one. Holidays, on the other hand, are often a time when we are asked to be our old selves.

Celebrations, customs, rituals, and people that once met the needs of the old self no longer seem to meet the needs of the emerging new self. The bereaved often feel confused during this time and vacillate between the “old me” and the “new me.” Thoughts like “I should be putting up the tree, but this year I’d rather decorate the window” or “I should have all the old friends over for the traditional get-together, but I’m just inviting my three best friends this year” are examples of this conflict. The “shoulds” are the “old me” speaking, and the new decisions are the “new me” asserting itself. The bereaved often feel guilty because they cannot meet both the old needs and the new needs, and the guilt adds to their holiday stress.

Final Note: remember, mourning knows no season; it will occur with or without the holidays. Understanding the above reasons why the bereaved sometimes feel worse during holidays may help them to feel less confused, lonely, and sad during the holiday season. *

About the Author



Richard J. Obershaw is the founder and director of the Grief Center in Lakeville, Minnesota. He lectures nationally and internationally on various social and psychological topics. He has authored *Cry Until You Laugh: Comforting Guidance for Coping with Grief*, and *Death, Dying, Grief and Funerals*. Dick has earned degrees in psychology and social work at the University of Wisconsin, a mortuary science degree from the Wisconsin Institute of Mortuary Science, and a master's degree in social work at the University of Minnesota. He is a wounded Vietnam veteran.

You are cordially invited to attend



**NATIONAL
MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR
& GOOD GRIEF CAMP**

★ MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND ★

May 23 to 26, 2014

Washington, DC



Please join us in the nation's capital for a weekend of hope, courage, and love.

An atmosphere of understanding and acceptance awaits you in a safe and supportive environment.

Meet other survivors and share the journey, as we honor our loved ones.

Remember the Love ★ Celebrate the Life ★ Share the Journey



2014 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Please Join Us

Please join us as we Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey.

TAPS extends a warm invitation for you to experience a weekend that will touch your heart and strengthen your spirit. Since our first national seminar in 1995, TAPS has welcomed all who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving in the military, providing a full weekend of events for adults and children alike. At the seminar you can connect with others who have suffered a similar loss, learn coping strategies, and hear how others find the strength to live again.

Workshops, support groups, activities, and events—all are structured to provide you with resources and information to help you begin to heal. You will receive support and training from nationally known

grief experts. Equally important, you will receive the precious gift of spending time with hundreds of other survivors, all walking a similar journey through grief. The four day event in our nation's capital begins with registration and opening sessions on Friday and ends with attendance at Memorial Day services at Arlington National Cemetery.

For anyone faced with the loss of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces, TAPS offers comfort and healing, while making time for us to honor our loved ones during the Memorial Day weekend. In the nation's capitol, we are surrounded by the monuments that honor the service and sacrifice of our loved ones and remind everyone that freedom is not free.

Start planning now to join us for a powerful time of support, care, and hope. Whether this is your first TAPS event or you are returning for our annual “family reunion,” a friendly smile, an understanding heart, and open arms await you. Join us as we remember the love, celebrate the life, and share the journey together.

★ REGISTRATION ★

Your registration fee assists TAPS in covering the cost of selected meals, workshop materials, TAPS shirt and tote bag, and ground transportation to all special events during the four day conference. The registration fee for children attending the Good Grief Camp assists with the costs of meals, transportation, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.

Along with these tangible items, you will take home the priceless experiences of the weekend and join with others to form vital connections that last a lifetime. This single investment in yourself provides dividends long after you depart. The time we spend with each other and the memories we take home are important as we face each new day and take each new step in our own personal journey of grief.



★ ACTIVITIES ★

WORKSHOPS FOR SURVIVORS & PROFESSIONALS

Our carefully chosen topics include understanding complicated grief; coping with new family dynamics; special issues facing children, parents, siblings and significant others; and recognizing post traumatic stress.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The national seminar is held in Washington, DC where we attend special ceremonies at the Marine Barracks, the Capitol, and Arlington National Cemetery. There is also plenty of free time for relaxing and visiting with your newfound friends.

PEER MENTOR TRAINING

If you are 18 months beyond your own loss and ready to be there for others, we offer a full day of training on Thursday, May 22, 2014. You will learn more about grief and trauma, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team. Register for the Peer Mentor Training as part of the general registration.

SUPPORT GROUPS

We offer gentle, supportive discussions that allow you a chance to share with others who are facing similar experiences.

GOOD GRIEF CAMP

TAPS Good Grief Camp is America's first established program for children and teens who have lost a parent or sibling in military service. The camp features sharing, learning coping skills, and having fun in a supportive environment. America's finest adolescent grief and trauma experts support the young survivors as they learn about our nation's capital while forging lasting friendships. In addition to the Good Grief Camp, we feature a parallel program, Honoring Heroes Camp, to assist those who may not need to learn coping skills, but still need to understand that they are part of the military heritage of honoring those who died while serving. Childcare is offered for those under four years old.



Register Online at
WWW.TAPS.ORG



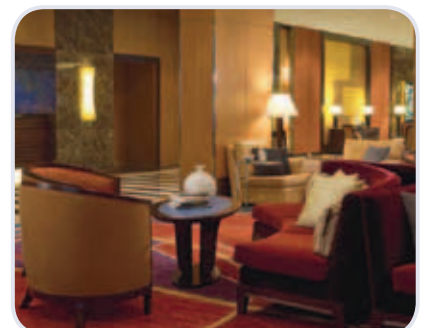
2014 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Register Now!

Start planning now to attend TAPS 20th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. Online registration is open, and space is limited. Go to www.taps.org and click on the Calendar of Events tab on the left side.

★ LOGISTICS ★

- All events and workshops take place in (or depart from) the Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, Virginia. Additional rooms are available at the adjacent Crystal City Marriott which is connected by an underground walkway.
- Both hotels offer complimentary airport shuttle service to Ronald Reagan National Airport. Flights into Dulles or BWI require transportation by taxi or SuperShuttle with fares ranging from \$45 to \$70.
- Each hotel offers an on-site restaurant in addition to a fitness center, indoor pool, and access to the Crystal City Shops and eateries. Room amenities include TV, telephone, clock radio, hair dryer, iron and ironing board, and coffeemaker/tea service.
- For information about free airfare through Fisher House Foundation's Hero Miles program, please check the seminar information pages on the TAPS website. The last day to apply for Hero Miles is March 26, 2014.
- To make your hotel reservation, visit the seminar webpage at www.taps.org to get our special conference rate of \$129.00 per night. The last day to register for the seminar and reserve a room is April 29, 2014.
- The seminar registration fee of \$195.00 includes selected meals, workshop materials, ground transportation to all special events, and a TAPS shirt and tote bag.
- The Good Grief Camp registration fee of \$75.00 per child assists in paying for selected meals, transportation for field trips and events, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.
- Events begin with check-in on Friday, so plan to arrive by 9:00 a.m. on Friday, May 23. Departure should be scheduled two hours after the end of the event you attend on Monday, May 26, to allow for our return from the event. For example, if you attend the ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, schedule your travel after 3:00 p.m. since the event ends at 1:00 p.m. If your plans require that you return home to participate in local Memorial Day ceremonies, you may wish to schedule your departure Sunday evening, May 25, after our closing ceremony ends at 4:00 p.m.
- A limited number of scholarships are available if you are facing financial challenges. Please call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS (8277) or email scholarships@taps.org for more information. *



Spotlight on Service

★ Phi Kappa Psi ★

Volunteers are a very important part of the TAPS family. We are grateful for the countless hours they donate and the part they play in supporting the TAPS mission. Volunteers, we salute you!

If you Google the word fraternity, you're likely to see news articles about hazing, racial bias, secret societies, or maybe even a video of an epic beer tournament. However, this isn't the case with Phi Kappa Psi, DC Alpha Chapter at George Washington University. If you were to ask students about Phi Psi and what they stand for, the first words you hear would likely be: philanthropy, giving, and brotherhood. Phi Psi chapter members pride themselves on their diversity and well-roundedness; the chapter doesn't fit a stereotype and has members of all walks of life with many different interests.

The Phi Kappa Psi DC Alpha Chapter was originally chartered in 1868. In 1899, the entire chapter enlisted in the Spanish-American War, and most were said to have died in active duty. The chapter was reorganized in 1987 and received their charter in 1990. When Phi Psi had the option to team up with TAPS, the members reflected back on the men who left as one unit to enlist in the military. They were enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with TAPS, a national Veterans Service Organization.

The chapter had their first contact with TAPS in the fall of 2009 when Connor Davy (Class of 2012) volunteered to put address labels on hundreds of letters being sent to TAPS families. After finishing pledging in the fall of that year, Connor approached the chapter leadership about working with TAPS.

With several active brothers and alumni in ROTC or the armed forces, the natural choice was to support their brothers in arms. They initially set out to create a fundraising drive benefitting TAPS.



*Thank You
Phi Kappa Psi!*

"Each year we have built upon the success of the previous event, innovating and raising more funds to support TAPS," said Phi Psi Executive Vice President Greg Langstine. Phi Psi's efforts have evolved from a day-long event to a full week of fundraising, events, and panels promoting TAPS and addressing the challenges faced by student veterans.

As the chapter continued fundraising for TAPS, members began volunteering in the TAPS offices and at local TAPS events. Fraternity brothers have been involved in National Military Survivor Seminars as well as assisting with Survivor Resource Kits,

staffing for the *Big Miracle* movie premiere, and working with the Annual TAPS Honor Guard Gala which has become one of the chapter's favorite events.

"The opportunity to be a part of the gala allows our attending brothers to personally connect with survivors, TAPS officials, and high-ranking military personnel," said Greg. "Each and every individual involved touches our hearts in a unique manner that drives us to commit more energy and hard work to our philanthropic endeavors."

In addition, he said, "Despite working with an immense number of volunteers each year, the TAPS staff never fails to make us feel like we have played a pivotal role in advancing their mission."

The hardest thing about volunteering is the time factor. "Most of our members have a number of obligations in addition to the academic demands of going to school. While we have never failed to provide volunteers when needed, even on short notice, there is always a feeling that we could have sent more guys—that we could have contributed more."

Phi Kappa Psi continues to be a strong pillar of support for TAPS. In this day and age when volunteerism is such an important factor for nonprofit success, TAPS looks forward to another great year with these awesome supporters who continue to be a great example and inspiration to others. ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

TAPS welcomes new volunteers. Email us at volunteer@taps.org or visit us at www.taps.org. Click on Support TAPS and then click on Volunteer to explore, sign up, and take our training course.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Back to the Basics

By Betty Ann Rutledge

The holiday season—with its inevitable reminders of the empty spaces in our families—is a good time to go back to the basics of what we know about grief.

Coping with the holidays begins for many immediately after Labor Day and continues through to January. For all of us, regardless of the spiritual or cultural traditions we observe, we are constantly bombarded with the daily messages of joy, celebration, food, festivity, and the gathering together of family and friends that signify the holiday season. For the bereaved, these messages and images, previously enjoyed and anticipated, may now provoke anxiety, loneliness, sadness, stress, and a profound sense of renewed pain over the loss of our loved ones.

We must learn how to experience and navigate these holidays and special occasions with the "new normal" of learning to live with our grief.

What we know about grief is that everyone grieves uniquely. We also know that there are some common manifestations of grief that are often shared no matter

what kind of loss is experienced. It may be helpful to spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

- ❁ How and what did I first learn about coping with loss?
- ❁ What is my primary style of coping now?
- ❁ What impacts my grief?
- ❁ What helps me when I am in a "hit of grief"?

It's also important to remember that grief affects us at all levels of our beings: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and sexual.

- ❁ Is that headache an indication that you are struggling with something just below the surface that needs space and time to be explored?
- ❁ When you come home and put your keys in the fridge and milk in the cupboard, is that mental confusion a sign that you are distracted by an aspect of your grief that longs for expression?
- ❁ What can you do to comfort yourself when those deep, painful waves of sorrow feel like they are literally breaking your heart?
- ❁ How are your relationships with family, friends and coworkers being impacted by your grief?

Your fatigue, frustration, sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, disorganization, and despair are all a normal part of grieving. Remember:

- ❁ Grief is a process, a journey.
- ❁ Give yourself permission to ask for what you need.

- ❁ Seek support; avoid prolonged periods of isolation.
- ❁ Balance in everything is good, so make sure you have time alone for quiet reflection.
- ❁ Your feelings are a natural expression of your love and attachment to your loved one who died; try not to judge any feeling as right or wrong.
- ❁ Listen to yourself; pay attention to the signals from your body, mind, heart, and spirit.
- ❁ Be gentle with yourself; avoid harsh criticism or high expectations. Patience, compassion, and loving-kindness for yourself are more important than ever.

Some say that a grief shared is lessened. Connecting with others who are bereaved may be helpful at this time. Consider attending a monthly bereavement support night, posting a message on the website, or attending a memorial event. My wish for all of us is that we will have the time, space, and support to allow us to embrace the memories of our loved ones. ★

About the Author

Betty Ann Rutledge is a professional volunteer manager with over 20 years of experience in the field of healthcare, death, dying and bereavement. Her work at the AIDS Committee of Toronto and Bereaved Families of Ontario included developing volunteer training programs based on the peer support model. She has journeyed with many people through illness, end of life, and bereavement including both her parents and many friends. She is committed to creating space for people to share their stories of loss, healing, resiliency, and meaning-making.



What Shall We Tell Them?

A letter to my family and friends

Dear Ones,

As I reflect on the eight months, six days, and fifteen hours since my son Brian's death, it is confusing to figure out where I stand in this grief trip that I hate. "Hate" is not a nice or feel-good word, but it is how I see this loss and feel it in the pit in my stomach. It would seem that at least this empty stomach pit would reflect a thinner me, but I think that as I try to remedy this hurt, I try filling it with chips. See, some of the old Deb is still lingering in my under layers.

This kind of moodiness should be reserved for adolescence, but the closeness of Brian's and my very souls couldn't help but be shaken by the separation.

My purpose for this letter is to try and tell my loving family and friends that I'm still in here and appreciate you trying to stay with me. I hate that I'm not the silly, goofy, and life-loving woman I was before. That person does find her way out sometimes, but there seems to be a maze of confusing feelings that I have to wander through to find her.

If at any time you are fearful of upsetting me by bringing up Brian's name, rest assured it is like a beautiful melody to hear, "Brian David Robinson, Bri, Burr-Head, or Soldier Boy." Thank you for allowing me to talk about him, laugh as I retell a story (he was so funny), recall the details of his illness and even the uncomfortable subject of his death. I still am not always able to realize that my "sunshine" is not going to call, text, e-mail or show up at my door.

Thank you for continuing to invite me to get-togethers, for understanding when I decline (even at the last minute), and for not taking this personally. It is confusing for me to figure out how much quiet time is enough or too much. What is even harder for me to figure out is how busy is too busy or not busy enough. Well, okay, this has always been a challenge for me.

I feel sad when I don't want to do things that I've always loved, but I'm hopeful that with time and grief work it'll get better. I'm not sure when.

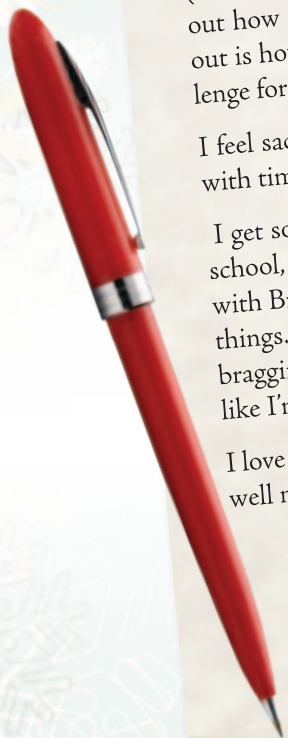
I get so tired but have a few things that I've chosen not to get too tired for. One is school, another is speaking of veterans' awareness, and a third one is spending time with Brian's daughter. I feel closer to Brian when I'm focusing on these things. He was proud of me going to school, and I even caught him bragging about me one time. I am going to earn my degree. It may look like I'm ready to drop sometimes, but I promise to stay safe!

I love you, my Dear Ones. I will be back to you some day completely—well never completely, but I should get better than I am today.

Love,

Deborah Robinson
Mom of Army Specialist Brian David Robinson

P.S. Please keep praying for me.



Looking for Sunshine in the Dark Winter Months

By Leslie Becker-Phelps, PhD

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although we are already suffering from the emotional upheaval of grief, the winter season can often bring an extra burden of sadness and gloom. The following article gives some suggestions for easy things we can incorporate into our day-to-day lives to ease the transition into the darker winter months and give us a ray of hope.

Darkness has been stealing into our days at an increasingly earlier hour. This, of course, happens every year. And, every year, I am reminded of the irony that, with the preparation for and celebration of winter holidays, we have to do more and more with less and less time. To make matters worse, we often feel confined by the cold that clings to the days and chases us indoors. Unfortunately for many of us,

the darkness, cold, and isolation usher in the winter blues.

You know you are suffering from the winter blues when you feel like you have more in common with a hibernating bear than just about anyone else. You feel tired and just want to be left alone. In addition, you probably feel sad, anxious, and irritable. And, as if that is not enough, you might be really hungry, especially for those wonderfully comforting and oh-so-bad-for-you cookies or candy—which, of course, leads to the dreaded winter weight gain.

If this sounds familiar, at least take comfort in knowing you're not alone. But, if these symptoms are so bad that they make it difficult to get through the day, then you might have a more serious problem than the blues. You might be

suffering from seasonal affective disorder (SAD—as apt an acronym as you're likely to find). It is a problem experienced by about four to six people in every hundred. If you think you could have SAD, then consult with a mental health care professional to assess and treat your condition.

Whether you are suffering from the winter blues or from SAD, you can help yourself by attending to three areas: light exposure, lifestyle, and emotional issues.

Light Exposure: Some of the most effective methods for alleviating the winter blues and SAD involve increasing your exposure to light. Below are some suggestions for how to do this.

- ◆ Spend at least 30 minutes outside every day, even when it is cloudy. You will benefit



TAPS siblings fight the winter blues together.

most from going outside at midday, when the light is the strongest. Although most of us know that we feel better with a little time outside, we often just don't do anything about it, especially in the winter. So, if you want to feel better, get out there.

- ♦ Try bright light therapy, which is exposure to artificial light that is brighter than usual home or office lighting. You can help alleviate your winter blues or SAD by sitting under this special light for 30 minutes every morning. This treatment has impressive results, relieving symptoms for about two thirds of people with seasonal affective disorder. To learn more about light therapy, check out the websites for the Center for Environmental Therapeutics (www.cet.org) and the Society for Light Treatment & Biological Rhythms (www.sltbr.org).

- ♦ Keep your home and office well lit with regular lamps and fixtures.

- ♦ Use a timer to turn a light on in your bedroom in the morning. Consider using a dawn simulator for a more naturalistic artificial dawn. To learn more about this, look at the websites listed above.

Lifestyle: While I don't expect that advice about how to create a healthy lifestyle is breaking news for you, I have found that most of us don't consistently follow it. Also, although maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be difficult any time of year, winter creates special challenges, such as encouraging us to stay indoors, remain sedentary, be relatively isolated, and have an appetite for carbohydrates. So, pay particular attention to the following advice during the fall and winter months.

- ♦ Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, three times a week. Consider taking brisk walks outside—they can provide you with daylight as well as exercise. If you have trouble motivating yourself, consider the advice of Nike: Just Do It!

- ♦ Eat a well-balanced diet. This will give you the energy you need in your day while reducing your body's craving for sweets

and starches. Again, it's not enough to just know this, you have to do it.

- ♦ Remain or become socially active. Social relationships can be supportive and keep you connected when you are inclined to isolate from the world. Consider meeting with a friend for your walks. Not only will you feel less depressed and alone, but research shows that people with healthy relationships are less susceptible to colds and are less likely to die from serious medical problems such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, and cancer.

- ♦ Plan activities you enjoy to help you maintain a positive attitude. Hopefully, once you get started, you will be naturally motivated to do more.

Emotional Issues: Difficult emotions are often stirred up during the holidays and can exacerbate the winter blues and SAD. So, be sure to pay attention to what is making you feel down. Consider whether the holidays tend to aggravate family squabbles or trigger negative memories. If you are sad or feel distressed about such issues, you need to address them directly.

- ♦ Manage unavoidable family problems during the holidays. Do this by limiting time with those who make you truly unhappy. Also, avoid conversations that you know will be upsetting. This might mean resolving to limit interactions with, say, your sister or mother-in-law. Such a decision would require you to accept the less than ideal nature of that relationship. Although this might be at odds with the harmonious relationship you would prefer, it can keep a difficult situation from becoming worse. In addition to directly managing such problems, seek out emotional support from a friend or sympathetic relative.

- ♦ Work on finding peace with "hot" issues so that they have less of a grip on your mental state. Give yourself time to think about these issues, perhaps even journaling about them. You might also want to talk with a supportive friend or a professional

therapist. However, limit that time and then follow it up with focusing, instead, on more positive parts of your life. So, for instance, allow yourself to be angry with your father's critical comments, but then focus on the loving relationship you have with your spouse.

- ♦ Use the suggestions in the above sections to help you feel better so that you can cope more effectively with emotionally distressing issues.

If all of this advice is overwhelming, decide on one of the three areas you would benefit most by attending to: light exposure, lifestyle, or emotional issues. Then focus on just one or two suggestions at a time. As you see some results, you'll find it easier to move on to addressing the other areas. With your continued efforts and time, the good feelings will eventually snowball into a happier winter. *

About the Author



Dr. Leslie Becker-Phelps, a licensed psychologist, is dedicated to helping people understand themselves and what they need to do to become emotionally and psychologically healthy. Her work is primarily devoted to her private practice, presenting, and writing. She is the author of *Insecure in Love* (available spring 2014). Dr. Becker-Phelps presents nationally on a variety of mental health issues, is the relationships expert on WebMD's *Relationships and Coping Community*, and writes blogs for both WebMD and *Psychology Today*. For more information visit www.drbecker-phelps.com.

The Poems of Sascha Wagner

By Sascha Wagner ★ Reviewed by Betsy Beard

This holiday season, if you are looking for a gift to give to yourself and perhaps to others who grieve, I would like to recommend *The Poems of Sascha Wagner*. It's a volume of poetry sold exclusively by The Compassionate Friends (TCF). TCF was started in England almost forty-five years ago and has grown to become an international self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to families that have experienced the death of a child of any age, from any cause.

But don't let the relationship stop you from ordering this book if your loved one was your spouse, sibling, or parent. *The Poems of Sascha Wagner* contains 184

pages of comforting poems along with the occasional heartfelt saying coined by Sascha Wagner. While some of the poems and sayings reflect Sascha's relationship as the mother of not one, but two, children who died, many of the poems will resonate with anyone who grieves.

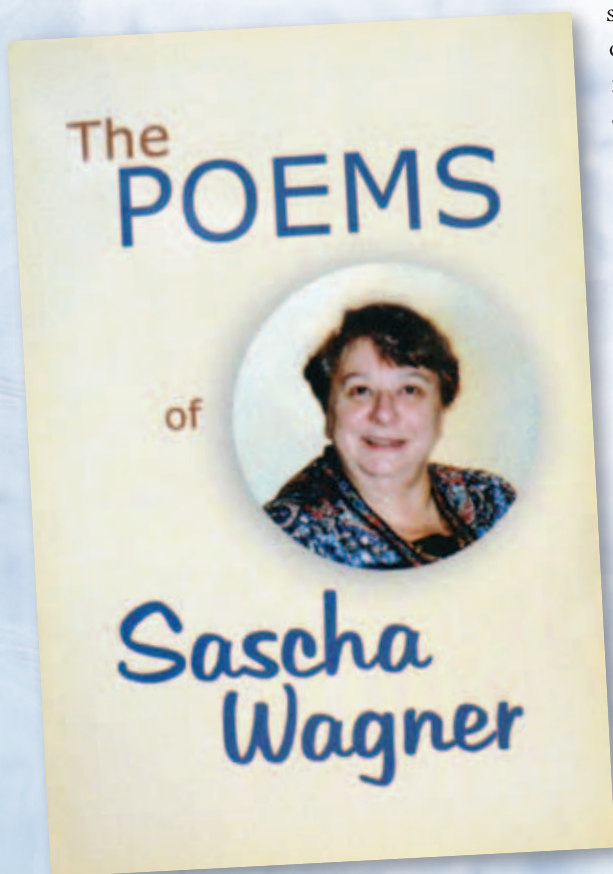
The poems are written in simple, forthright language, making the book perfect for readers of all ages. Although the reading is easy, the messages are profound and thoughtful. They are especially helpful to those who are new to grief, but also bring light and hope to those who are farther along.

The book is divided into five sections that mirror our journey on the strange path of grief. The first section, titled "At First," details the early days of grief and the unanswered questions our souls agonize over. The second section, titled "Findings," shows us the miniscule signs that point to areas of small progress and hard-won healing. The third section, "Bittersweet," brings up recurring themes, while the fourth section, "Full Circle," details the calendar cycle from New Year's Day to the winter holidays, including both Hanukkah and Christmas. The last section, titled "Endowment," contains reminders of the legacy of our loved ones. You can pick up the book and find solace for a few brief moments or spend an entire evening basking in the comfort and love of a person who has walked the road of grief ahead of us.

I find it remarkable, if not downright difficult to believe, that English was not Sascha's first spoken language. Born in Bremen, Germany, Sascha immigrated to the United States in 1947. Her new life in America was tragically marred when her son Nino drowned. Fifteen years later on the anniversary of Nino's death, Sascha's daughter Eve died by suicide. Having lost her only children, Sascha managed to survive and persevere, earning a bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado in 1968 and a master's degree in 1975 from the University of Denver. After spending thirty years in various areas of mental health work, Sascha initiated a professional support service for persons with panic disorders and/or agoraphobia.

Before her death in 2003, Sascha provided workshops internationally as well as writing several small volumes of poetry. Her poems have provided solace for bereaved people for years, having been used extensively in TCF chapter newsletters. After her death, Sascha's estate awarded the copyrights for Sascha's writing to TCF, so that her words could continue to encourage others whose hearts are broken.

You can order copies of *The Poems of Sascha Wagner* from the TCF website at www.compassionatefriends.org. From the home page, hover over the Resources tab and click on "Books and Magazines Available" on the left side of the drop-down menu. But don't wait too long if you want the book for the holidays, as quantities are limited. ★



Wintersun

By Sascha Wagner

*There are those days in winter
When your world is frozen
Into a vision of eternal ice,
When earth and air
Are strangers to each other,
When sound and color seem forever gone.*

*There are those days in winter
When you feel like dying,
When life itself surrenders you to anguish,
To total mourning and to endless grief.*

*And then it happens: from the bitter sky
A timid sun strides to his silent battle
Against the grey and hostile universe.
It changes ice to roses, sky to song.*

*And then it happens that your heart recalls
Some distant joy, gladness from the past.
A slender light at first, then larger, braver,
Until your mind returns to hope and peace.
Let memories be beauty in your life,
Like song and roses in the winter sun. ☆*

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About the Author

Sascha Wagner was the surviving mother of Nino who drowned when he was three years old and Eve who died by suicide on the 15th anniversary of his death. In 1998, she was honored with the award for The Compassionate Friends Professional of the Year.

Run and Remember Team Finding the FUN in Fundraising

Since October of 2000 when the first Run and Remember Team of two runners raised nearly five thousand dollars, fundraising has been a part of the team's efforts on behalf of TAPS. Not only do TAPS runners spend time training for the event, but they also use their skills and ingenuity to raise awareness and raise funds in support of the TAPS mission.

Some runners run only one time, while others come back year after year. They put our loved ones' photos on their backs for the big event, but for months leading up to the race, they put their hearts on their sleeves and ask friends, neighbors, and community to follow their lead. We asked some of our runners for the secrets to their fundraising successes, and they shared their approach to raising funds as well as their reasons for running.

If you've been considering joining the team—whether to run, walk, or cheer others on—some of the ideas that follow may help you ease into fundraising for TAPS.

Starting in the year 2000, Run and Remember Team Director Marie Campbell has raised between \$2,000 and \$5,000 each year. In the beginning, she told donors of the impact TAPS had in her own healing.

As a "seasoned" surviving spouse, Marie now shares stories of more recently bereaved survivors. "TAPS was there to help me when I needed it, because generous people gave their dollars," she said. "Now I want to pay that gift forward so that other families can receive the help they need to cope and heal."

For the most part Marie has the same returning donors each year. She asks only once a year, using Facebook to solicit donations to her fundraising website. However, she shares some of the amazing things that TAPS is actively doing by posting videos or news articles throughout the year. "It gives my donors opportunities to see their dollars at work," she said.

Ross Harris is an Army veteran who lost a brother in the 82nd Airborne while Ross was still in high school. At that time, TAPS did not exist. "It never crossed my mind that there should be someone I could talk to," said Ross. "Had TAPS existed, there is no doubt my family would have benefited."

Ross uses the power of multiplication in his fundraising efforts. Once people donate, he asks them to reach out to others. His family, friends, Army buddies, and co-workers help spread the word and find additional supporters.

Ross also created a PowerPoint presentation to show the impact of military death on surviving families. "I am not afraid to ask anyone at any time to support TAPS," he said. "I just talk to everyone I can and never hesitate to ask for one dollar or ten or a hundred. Once I started talking to people, I kept increasing my goal to ensure that people wouldn't limit their donation just because I had met my goal."

Joanie Montgomery has been running in support of TAPS since 2006. She makes use of social media and her imagination in her fundraising efforts. "Tell your friends that to get their money, you will cook for them, clean, or even change your appearance," she said.

Using Facebook, Joanie posts her fundraising offers. Whether it's home-baked cookies for donors or taking a pie in the face, she sets the donation at a specified amount and adds the link to her fundraising page. Some offers lend themselves to posting



additional photos to generate interest. For a pie in the face, post photos of the pie before and after (on your face) when donations total the specified amount. "The main thing is to think of an incentive, place a value on it, and then post photos of the proof," said Joanie. "Remember to thank your donors. Everyone likes to see his or her name in print. Get a photo with the donor and post that, too, if you can."

Scott Schmidt's secret is in the planning. He starts four months before the race. Working with survivor Dawn Rowe to share her story in his "ask" email, Scott wanted his network of friends and associates to be able to identify with a specific person. "I wanted to differentiate TAPS from all of the other noble causes by showing the human aspect of it," said Scott. "I think it made a huge difference. It's much easier to give when you see a face and hear a story."

Scott made sure he was the first to donate (\$200 to set the bar for other donors) and that it was displayed on the scrolling banner on the fundraising website. Follow-up is another key. He sent a note to his list of potential donors every three weeks, giving updates on his training, information about TAPS, and reminders that corporations sometimes will match their employees' donations. Each time, there was a wave of donations. Starting with a goal of \$5,000, Scott reached it in a week. He sent a note of appreciation for the support, and raised the goal to \$10,000, followed by \$15,000 several weeks later.

Shalan Webb is the surviving spouse of Staff Sergeant Chris Webb. The first year she ran was the easiest year to raise funds. Chris's death was still recent and many people wanted to support the family. "I sent the letter to every single person I had an email for. If I didn't have an email I sent a letter through the mail." The next year she had moved to a new community, but formed

a larger team and created a competition among her team members. "I wanted us to be the top fundraisers like we were the year before."

When Shalan's daughter Mary was finally old enough to run the MCM Healthy Kids Fun Run, Shalan geared the fundraising to include Mary's story. "Running is a small way for me to show my appreciation to an organization that means the world to me. I truly have no idea how I could have made it without TAPS."

Tim Savoy joined the Run and Remember Team in 2011 at the age of 19. When TAPS paired Tim with Patrick Dolphin, Tim reached out to the fallen soldier's family to learn as much as he could about Patrick. "Patrick's mom and dad both support my campaign and help me recruit donors," he said. "In a way, we have become a part of each other's support system."

As an undergraduate, Tim's network of donors consisted of students on tight budgets, and social media allowed him to reach a donor base that he otherwise might not have engaged. His approach was to develop a campaign. Using a weekly video blog on YouTube to encourage donations, he recorded blogs about his training and reflected on Patrick's life as well as his own. "Even though I am running a one-time event," he said, "the narrative of my fallen

soldier's story can be told over the course of several months."

Tim runs for TAPS because it reminds him every day of the sacrifices made to protect our country. "Patrick and I will never know each other," he said, "but I feel like I know him because of my journey with TAPS. Even as I reflect now, I think about how much more we can do to support our soldiers and their families. TAPS has forever changed me for the better." *

For more information about running, fundraising, or having your loved one paired with a Run and Remember Team runner, write to run@taps.org. You may even find that healing comes your way as you set out to embrace the mission of TAPS and give back so that others who follow will find help, hope, and healing.



Glasgow Gathering 2013

Making Memories Across the Ocean

By Kellie Hazlett ★ TAPS Survivor Care Team

“Remember the Love, Share the Heartache, Honour the Fallen However They Fell”
~ BEREAVED FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

Joining hands and hearts across the globe to honor and remember the fallen was the essence of the first ever TAPS/BFSG gathering. The Bereaved Families Support Group (BFSG) is a program of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families' Association (SSAFA), a United Kingdom nonprofit organization that has been supporting their military families since 1885. This year TAPS families were graciously invited to join BFSG for an annual national meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland. With great excitement, the American families traveled across the pond to represent TAPS in the United Kingdom.

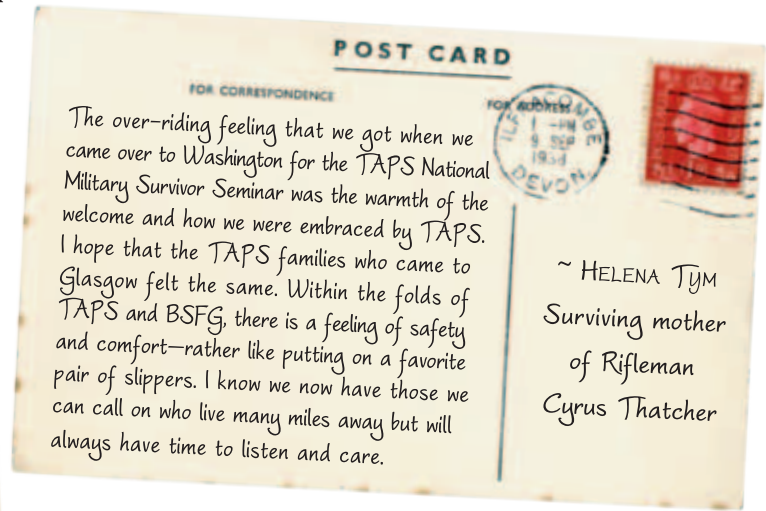
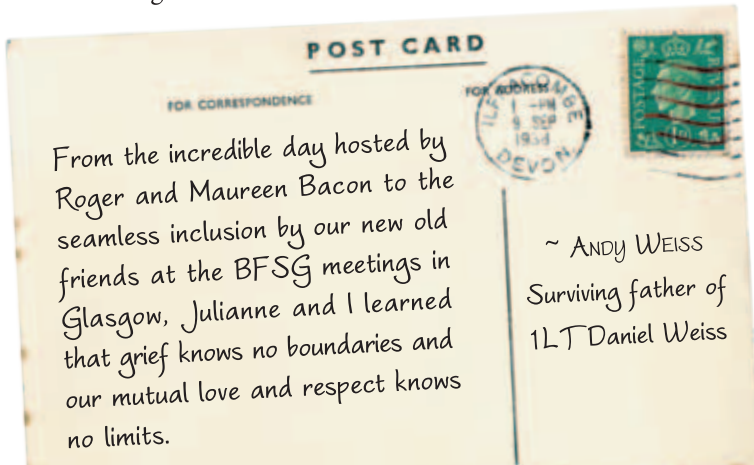
As the TAPS families arrived, they were treated to a spectacular glimpse into London's rich military history and culture by special ambassadors Roger and Maureen Bacon, bereaved British parents. They were among the many others who had the vision to bring our two groups together to remember the love, celebrate the life, and share the journey.

The group was then whisked away for their first adventure in the foreign land. They participated in a historic walking tour around Buckingham Palace followed by a visit to Westminster Abbey.

Roger, with his passion for military history, shared how the British

honor their fallen. One significant and honorable way the English remember their fallen is to travel to memorial areas around the country and place a wooden cross with their loved one's name and picture on it.

“As we stand here at Westminster Abbey today,” said Roger, “imagine how on Remembrance Day there will be hundreds of wooden crosses stretched as far as you can see, honoring our fallen soldiers.” Many reflected on what a sight that would be to see in November. Silence and respect were the watchwords that day as the families were personally invited to have a cross



placed on Remembrance Day this year, a touching tribute for the American participants. Remembrance Day, also known as Poppy Day or Armistice Day, is observed in the United Kingdom on November 11 each year.

The group was in for another special treat as Lord Dannatt, a good friend of the Bacons and Constable of the Tower of London, arranged a private tour of the Tower of London to include Queen Mary's house. The Yeoman Warder tour guide was especially interesting, as he regaled the group with chilling stories about the Tower's 1,000 year history.

A precious and solemn moment took place during the visit to St. Paul's Cathedral, where the group viewed the American memorial nestled in the back of the beautiful cathedral. The group was particularly touched by the special welcome to TAPS families during evening song.

After a long day of touring key areas in London, the TAPS tourists joined together for a meal at a traditional pub to rest, relax, and reminisce about the day's events.

In addition to the London tour, the families toured Windsor Castle, where they watched the changing of the guard. The families enjoyed a meal that included superb British entertainment and thanked Roger and Maureen for their wonderful hospitality.

With bubbling anticipation on their train ride north, the families arrived at the Glasgow, Scotland rail station in advance of BFSG's national meeting. Many shared how inspired they were to meet, comfort, and

share their loved ones with fellow United Kingdom bereaved families. The grand welcome at dinner laid a foundation for memorable moments to come as the families gathered.

TAPS survivors did not hesitate to reach out and share the heartache and—more importantly—the wonderful memories of their loved ones. The buzz filled the room as instant connections were made. The true joy of memories and experiences were shared as families from both sides recognized the horrific losses worldwide.

One of the highlights of the weekend occurred when Bonnie Carroll, president and founder of TAPS, was given the honor of laying the wreath at the war memorial in Victoria Park. Participants laid roses with pictures of their loved ones alongside the wreath.

"We are all going through the same loss together as bereaved families; many of our loved ones even served alongside each other," said Carroll. Tears were shed, hugs of comfort were given, and lifelong friendships were formed. As the meeting came to an end, families exchanged contact information and promised to adopt

each other's loved ones. Many shared that they would count it a privilege to honor and cherish the fallen regardless of the distance apart.

During the closing ceremony, the families reflected on the common thread that allowed them to participate in the joint TAPS/ BFSG Gathering 2013. *



Holiday Giving Made Easy

Take the TAPS Holiday Express



*“It’s not how much we give,
but how much love we
put into giving.”*

~ Mother Teresa

TAPS is fortunate to have generous supporters all over the country. Mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, neighbors, teachers, and friends give to honor America’s fallen heroes. They give with love, they give with tears, and they give to give back.

ALL ABOARD

During this season of giving, we wanted to share some ways that you can give to TAPS by shopping from the comfort of your home. So make yourself a cup of hot chocolate and check out the websites below. When you shop online using these portals, you will be giving back to support

the mission of TAPS without incurring any extra expense. You will even save on your gas money and avoid the holiday crowds.

FIRST STOP

First, plan to visit iGive at www.igive.com. This wonderful online shopping tool allows you to select a charity to receive a portion of your online shopping purchases. iGive members generate donations by shopping at any of the 1,200 plus stores ranging from fashion and beauty to electronics, toys, and hotels. You’ll find many of your favorite online retailers like Amazon, the Apple Store, Bed Bath & Beyond, Best Buy, Dell, Expedia, Harry & David, L.L.Bean, Petco, PetSmart, Pottery Barn, Toys R Us, and Travelocity, to name just a few.

Please consider using iGive for your online purchases, so that you support TAPS. There are no costs, obligations, or hidden fees. It’s all automatic; you don’t need to enter any codes or notify any stores.

When iGive members shop by way of the special links, charities receive 100% of the donation amount which is advertised on the iGive website.

NEXT STOP

For your next stop of the season, visit our online store at www.taps.org/shop. The TAPS store offers items for everyone on your list. Choose from Afghan bracelets and our award-winning Klinger book to TAPS travel mugs, aprons, and tote bags. All purchases from the TAPS online store will come directly from our national headquarters, lovingly packed by TAPS volunteers.

✿ Afghan Bracelets: Women in Kabul create beauty in the midst of chaos by making jewelry from their native Lapis Lazuli stones. Lapis lazuli, literally “stone of heaven,” is a relatively rare semi-precious stone that is prized for its intense blue color.



Mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, neighbors, teachers, and friends give to honor America's fallen heroes. They give with love, they give with tears, and they give to give back. ALL ABOARD.



✿ Klinger book and Klinger stuffed animal, sold separately: The 8" plush Klinger stuffed horse is the image of the real Klinger who works in Arlington National Cemetery as a Caisson horse.

✿ TAPS Travel Mug: The 16 ounceervis tumbler is great for both hot and cold, fits in most cup holders, and is microwave, freezer, and dishwasher safe. Lid sold separately.

TAPS Partner Items:

At the TAPS online store, you can also click on the tab at the top, TAPS Partner Items, for additional special merchandise offers that benefit TAPS. Shoppers can visit links to TAPS partners who give a portion of their proceeds to TAPS.

✿ Flowers can brighten the season: In addition to flowers, gifts ordered from this site for Fannie May Candy, Cheryl's Cookies, the Popcorn Factory, and gift baskets or fruit arrangements are eligible. Click on the Order Now button from our partner page to be redirected to 1800flowers.com. Use the promo code

TAPS so that 15% of your purchase will be donated to TAPS.

✿ Jewelry from Planet Jill: Planet Jill specializes in custom jewelry of unique, original designs with photographic images permanently in place. Click on the Order Now button from our partner page to be redirected to Planet Jill. Use promotional code TAPS for a discount of 20% to you and a gift of 20% to TAPS.

✿ TAPS Special Blend Coffee: Green Beans Coffee developed this special premium blend for TAPS and will contribute a portion of your purchase to TAPS. Click on the Order Now button from our partner page to be redirected to Green Beans Coffee.

LAST STOP

But wait, there's more!

✿ Are you an eBay user? If so, log on to givingworks.ebay.com and choose Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors as your charity of choice before making purchases.

✿ For the sports fans on your list or when you need an extra boost of courage, visit www.washingtonwizards.com/courage and purchase a Courage Cap through the Courage Caps Campaign presented by Telos Corporation. This season the Wizards will sell Courage hats with 100% of the proceeds benefitting TAPS. Hats off to the Wizards! Or would it be hats on? *

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

TAPS continues to be grateful to partners like Riunite, Sevenly, and Monumental Sports and Entertainment Foundation for their generous cause-related marketing support in 2013. To learn more about ways to give and support TAPS, visit www.taps.org/support.



TAPS Casework Assistance

Help is Here When You Need It

By Glenn Gray ★ Director of Casework and Community Engagement

As those who have come in touch with TAPS soon learn, one of our primary missions is to provide support and guidance to our survivor families, helping to overcome the emotional hurdles of military loss and identifying solutions that allow you to focus on celebrating the life of your loved one.

TAPS also recognizes that there are always points in your journey—whether days after the loss or even months or years—where other external hurdles can get in the way of your efforts to continue your journey of healing. Sometimes it's confusion over the many new benefits or services that could be available to you as a survivor. Other times it may be an unforeseen medical, legal, or financial problem. Whatever the issue, it can be a cause for great stress, fear, and concern for you and for your family members.

To that end, the TAPS Casework Department is here to help you navigate those concerns, work to find appropriate solutions, and help you get back to focusing on your journey. Our Casework Advocates are available to speak to a number of topics of concern to our TAPS family members, to include questions about funeral and burial benefits, survivor financial benefits, health care, education and scholarship options, financial and legal issues, and many more subjects common to our community. Here are just a few of the many ways TAPS can help:

› Guide you through your benefit questions and put you in touch with the right people to guarantee you are getting the benefits your loved one earned and provided for you



There are always points in your journey — whether days after the loss or even months or years — where other external hurdles can get in the way of your efforts to continue your journey of healing.

› Connect you with experts at TRICARE, DEERS and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure that you and your children are coordinated with the appropriate health care

› Provide you with updated information on federal, state, and private education scholarships, as well as share the information you need to know about school tuition for both you and your children

› Contact partner organizations on your behalf that may be able to fulfill requests for financial assistance

› Pursue pro bono legal options, if available in your area

› Identify local resources in your community for a host of different needs and requests

› Recommend options for employment assistance and job searches

› Ensure that you receive the documentation, military honors and awards, and other items you and your family members deserve in recognition of your family member's sacrifice to our nation.

There is no straight path to healing. Each person's journey is bumpy, with obstacles throwing you off track now and then. This is normal, and usually you can get yourself back on track by identifying the source of this problem, determining if you can solve the problem yourself and, if not, reaching out to those around you for support. That said, please keep us in mind for the next time one of those obstacles is too big for you to

overcome on your own. We are here for you.

To speak with a TAPS Casework Advocate, call us at 800-959-TAPS and ask for the Casework Department or email us at casework@taps.org. *

About the Author

Glenn Gray joined TAPS as the Senior Program Director for Casework and Community Engagement in April of 2013, after a long history working in support of TAPS and its families through his prior role with TriWest Healthcare Alliance, a TRICARE military health care contractor. Glenn is a former staff member for U.S. Senator John McCain and received his bachelor's degree in political science from Arizona State University.

Thank You to Our Donors & Sponsors

We are grateful to the Friends of TAPS whose personal gifts, memorial tributes, grants, event sponsorships, and planned gifts enable TAPS to comfort and care for the loved ones of those who served and died.

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