

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served & Died

# T★A★P★S®

VOLUME 22 • ISSUE 3

MAGAZINE

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TAPS Magazine is dedicated to America's fallen heroes and their survivors. The magazine is written by and distributed quarterly to surviving families, friends and caregiving professionals. We hope you find inspiration, comfort, support, resources and a sense of belonging within these pages.

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501 (c) (3) Veterans Service Organization that publishes *TAPS Magazine* in furtherance of its mission to support survivors whose loved one served and died.



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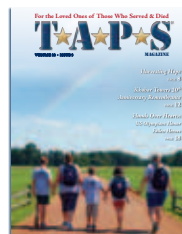
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#### ON THE COVER

*TAPS families find healing at the end of the rainbow in Tennessee at the TAPS Family Campout.*

# FEATURES

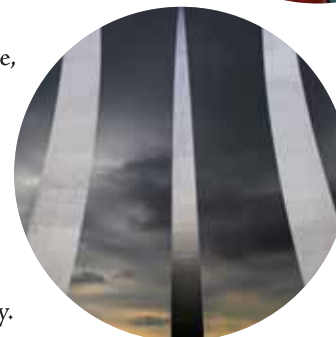
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As our grief journeys yield insights, strengths, and even new questions and disappointments, they still promise hope and bounty if we are willing to do the harvest work.



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An act of cowardice claimed the lives of 19 Airmen in 1996. With acts of courage, the families reclaimed their futures. TAPS was there to support and help them every step of the way.



## 18 Hands Over Hearts: US Olympians Honor Fallen Heroes By Diana Hosford

In a uniform of a different kind, athletes in Rio brought joy to our country. More importantly, many Olympians found special meaning as our flag was hoisted for the medal ceremony. Hands over their hearts. Honoring the fallen heroes our TAPS families hold dear.



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Love our new racing singlet? Sign up to run a race with Team TAPS. For more information about upcoming races, contact [teamtaps@taps.org](mailto:teamtaps@taps.org).

# Share Your TAPS Story



I don't know where I would be without TAPS in my life. They give so much more than they ever imagine. They provide a sense of hope when it feels as if all hope has been lost. They give a sense of foundation when the ground seems to continuously crumble. They give friendship and understanding. When they say, "I know what you are going through," they really do understand. All of a sudden you realize you aren't the first person to walk down this path. Unfortunately, you also realize you won't be the last.

**Cynthia Renee' Nacin, Florida**  
Surviving sister of  
Petty Officer 1st Class (HM1)  
Steven M. Paige

The first week of August, my daughter and I attended the Tennessee Family Campout at Victory Ranch. I saw my daughter live like a rock star (well, kind of). I saw her rock the high ropes course, with her TAPS family encouraging her and congratulating her. Later at lunch, other TAPS family congratulated her, having heard how she was fearless and just rocked it.

Then, I got to see her connect with a new friend. They found common interests and conspired to sing for their TAPS family. Again, her TAPS family, in true close-knit and supportive family style, told her how well she did and how proud they were of her.

The Family Campout was a unique opportunity. The TAPS family group was smaller than regional or national seminars, with only about 20 families participating. Very quickly, everyone became acquainted and started to

make connections. The kid groups were smaller, helping them bond faster. We shared bunk rooms and cabins. We ate together. We played together. We cheered each other on. We sang and danced together. We were family.

So, once again, I find myself being grateful for TAPS. I'm thankful for the connections, the support, the experiences. And, my kids are, too.

**Sarah Parrish, Missouri**  
Surviving spouse of  
Sgt. Lawrence Parrish

I must confess, I have wanted to write since I was little. So when the opportunity came to submit an article about Peer Mentors — a program about which I am passionate — I jumped at the chance. Literally. I jumped up and down like a 6-year-old.

Writing for TAPS, an organization that has supported my family without exception, was beautifully overwhelming. Added to that is the idea that someone might read my words and explore the Peer Mentor program — something I know can change lives.

This will be remembered as the moment I finally lived up to those 6-year-old dreams.

**August Cabrera, West Virginia**  
Surviving spouse of  
Lt. Col. David Cabrera

After the inaugural Inner Warrior Wellness Weekend in August, I left behind self-judgement. It was the first time in 10 years

for me to meet with others like this, and I left fulfilled. I can now pat myself on the back because I showed up. I did it. The weekend gave me the clarity and awareness that I am the barrier to wellness. It is hard to be in a good place if my body is rotting away under me. Thanks, TAPS, for starting me on a new journey!

**Charles Good, Georgia**  
Surviving father of  
Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew Good

I want to thank TAPS for all your support. TAPS contacted us at the start of our great loss. We received phone calls and all kinds of informative information which helped us. We still receive booklets which we enjoy reading and find informative. For everything you do, thank you!

**Jim and Terry Martinelli, New York**  
Surviving parents of  
Spc. Anthony Michael Martinelli

My experience as a first-time volunteer with TAPS was breathtaking. I was able to confirm that just being there next to my mentee provided him a safe environment to aid in healing and growth, but I also realized the amazing reward, comfort and growth that the relationship brought me in my own development. It was a pleasure to be a part of the team and I look forward to future opportunities to serve. Thank you for a great experience!

**Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Walton,**  
California

If you have a question or comment, please write to [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).

# After a Season of Suffering

Dear TAPS Family,

For me, autumn is a time of harvest, celebration, gratitude and thanksgiving. And, yet, in some seasons of my own life, the early darkness, fallow garden and dropping leaves served as a physical metaphor of my own grief journey — the unbearable pain and utter hopelessness of loss.

I am fortunate to live in a part of the country where autumn actually serves as a second growing season. It's a gentler, more temperate time when the rains come again and the sun loses its blistering intensity. The salvia, which grew leggy over the summer, bushes out again and the sage, basil, oregano and thyme perk up and work to fill up garden space. Even herbs that seem spent will seed in anticipation of a final round of growth. It's like a surprise growth spurt before the end of the harvest.

I do not think it a coincidence that European gardeners in centuries past, and more recently American gardeners, attached more solemn virtues to plants that thrive in the fall versus those that herald the spring. Oh, there's nothing frivolous about gladness (crocus) or regard (daffodil) or the pleasures denoted by the sweet pea. But I especially celebrate rosemary's remembrance, salvia's eternal regard,

and sage's nod to wisdom and immortality. In the language of herbs and flowers, the spring daisy represents young love, whereas the aster, which closes out the growing season, represents steadfast love. Isn't that what we learn at TAPS? Our steadfast love for our heroes will bloom season after season.

Perhaps one of the experiences that will help you grow in your grief this year is participation at a TAPS event such as the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp in October. Hundreds of us will join together in Florida to celebrate and remember loved ones who died by suicide. TAPS is also closing out National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month with our #HopeHelpHeal campaign highlighting shared stories and tributes to our loved ones.

As is true in many families, fall and the back-to-school season find some members of our TAPS family scattered around the globe. Some of us will gather soon in London to celebrate and share with one another, while others will find inspiration on the running course with Team TAPS and Inner Warrior. Wherever you find

yourself, slow down for an Indian summer reflection on your progress.

This issue of the *TAPS Magazine* is much like a fall garden. Within its pages, I hope you will find something that allows you to identify the headway you've made in your own grief work. What does your harvest look like, no matter how modest? Perhaps you have been guided in part by the care and concern of a Peer Mentor "master gardener," someone who has done this work for longer than you and is more familiar with the cycles, frustrations and failures that are part and parcel of the healing journey.

I hope the article honoring the legacy of those who perished 20 years ago in the Khobar Towers bombing attack in Saudi Arabia also conveys that TAPS shares the grief journey with all survivors for as long as it takes. We are reminded in the "Harvesting Hope" article that just as in farming, the large and overwhelming totality of our grief work can be broken down into more manageable elements and does not have to be undertaken all at once.

As you take stock, all of us at TAPS hope that part of what you reap from this issue is the power to give thanks — even in your season of suffering — and the ability to store up the small successes. Take the inspiring stories, the affirmation of your grief companions, and the forever love that will never decay or die and tuck it away for those barren times when it seems as though summer will never return.

With care,

*Stephanie Frogge, MTS*

Survivor Helpline

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For more information about TAPS,  
visit [www.taps.org/events](http://www.taps.org/events).

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# TENDING THE GARDEN OF GRIEF

## With Mindfulness Meditation

Autumn in my small farming town in mid-Maryland is a time of harvest and abundance. Farmers markets are in full swing, nourishing our bodies with healthy vegetables and filling our senses with vibrant colors and smells. And yet it is a time where nature's energy begins to wind down in preparation for winter, which I like to think of as nature's sacred pause. Autumn is a time of transition and reflection — of letting go and receiving. It is not surprising that many cultures across thousands of years have associated autumn with the complex experience of human grief.

Just like the wise farmer, we too can use this season as a reminder to reflect on the fruits of our grief work. We will find that some activities help us blossom, such as attending TAPS events, doing charity work in honor of our loved one, walking in nature or spending time with friends and family — to name a few.

We may also decide to dig up some weeds — those pesky habits that are not so supportive to our health and well-being. But be kind to yourself. This is not the time to beat yourself up. The key to successful self-inquiry is self-compassion, or treating yourself as you would a beloved friend who is in need of support. Let go of the shame and the blame to whatever extent it is possible.

The work ahead is about empowerment and choice.

Sound easier said than done? Fortunately, there are several easy-to-learn meditative techniques that can help us weed out our mind chatter so we can create space for our new harvest. One of my favorite tools is mindfulness meditation. You may have heard about mindfulness on the nightly news or from your doctor. A recent surge in mindfulness-based research has proven that it's effective for reducing anxiety, depression and chronic pain, as well as improving brain and immune functioning — and that's just a partial list of the benefits.

I love mindfulness meditation because it has taught me to relate to my thoughts in a different way. Rather than viewing my thoughts as permanent fixtures in my mind, I have learned that they come and go. I also have the power to shift or expand my attention when a thought tries to take over my experience. You have that power, too — it just takes a little practice.

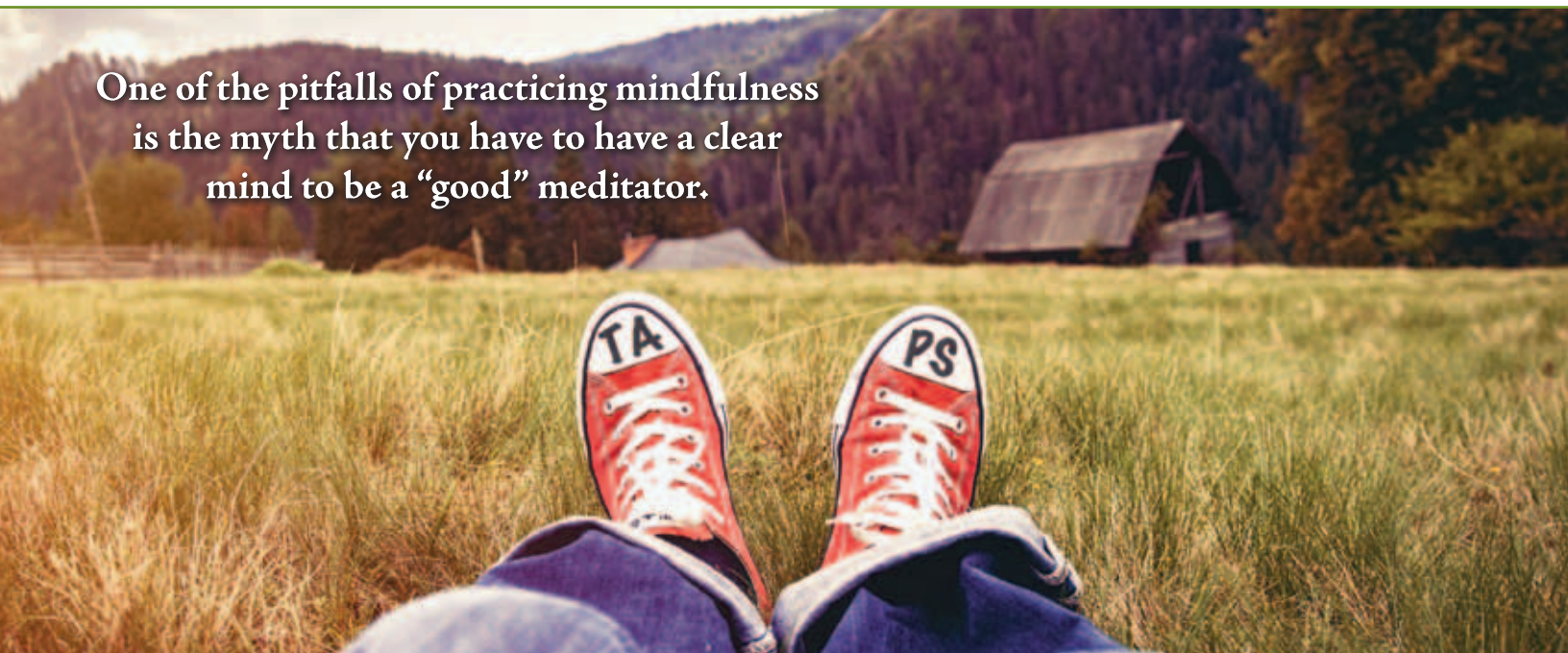
Don't worry if you have never meditated before. Chances are you have experienced moments of mindfulness in your life already. Do you remember a time where you felt totally present, alert and awake? You were

not thinking about the past or the future but just paying attention to the moment at hand. Maybe you were gazing at a picture-perfect sunset, taking a bite of the most delicious dessert, focused on knitting, running or fixing a vintage car. These are examples of informal mindfulness — paying attention on the spot. It's not so much about what you're doing, it's the quality of attention and your attitude while you're doing it.

Formal mindfulness practice simply means that you have set aside a period of time to pay attention to what is happening in the present moment, which may include things you see, hear, smell, taste or feel in and on your body and even your thoughts. You have probably seen pictures of meditators sitting on cushions on the floor, but it is perfectly acceptable to sit in a chair or even walk.

Ideally, you will incorporate a blend of formal and informal practice into your life each day. Start with five minutes of seated meditation. Over a period of four weeks, work your way up to 20 minutes a day. Sprinkle in a little informal practice each day. Taste the first bite of your sandwich at lunch. Literally stop and smell the flowers on the way to work. Or take 15 seconds to gaze at the sky as though you are looking at it for the first time.

**One of the pitfalls of practicing mindfulness is the myth that you have to have a clear mind to be a “good” meditator.**



One of the pitfalls of practicing mindfulness is the myth that you have to have a clear mind to be a “good” meditator. In my professional opinion, the only requirement for being a “good” meditator is that you try to meditate. It is normal for the human mind to have ruminating thoughts about the past or future. It is abnormal to steady your human mind on the present moment, but it is incredibly rewarding. Each time you catch yourself drifting and then remember to bring yourself back from distraction to an object of focus — such as your breath — you are retraining your brain to work with you rather than against you.

Ultimately, you are cultivating the quality of equanimity — a steady and calm mind.

Just as the autumn equinox gives equal attention to both day and night, the practice of mindfulness meditation sheds light on all aspects of our experience — pleasurable, unpleasurable and neutral. This in turn illuminates the sources of our habits and addictions, including what we do to seek pleasure and the measures we take to avoid pain. Once you unearth these patterns and discern what serves you, it is time to pull the weeds and plant new seeds. There is freedom in realizing you are not your thoughts, and you are not your grief. You are much bigger than that. You are awareness itself — the sun shining over your garden of experience — no matter what the season.



**BY HEATHER STANG, MA**

*Heather is an author and thanatologist who teaches others to cope with grief through mindfulness-based techniques at the Frederick Meditation Center in Maryland. Her articles, blogs and free guided meditations can be found at [MindfulnessAndGrief.com](http://MindfulnessAndGrief.com) and on Twitter under the handle @HeatherStangMA.*

## Guided Self-Inquiry Meditation • By Heather Stang, MA

Set aside 10 to 20 minutes where you won't be disturbed and your environment is relatively quiet. Read through these instructions a few times before you practice, or download the guided meditation at <http://mindfulnessandgrief.com/self-inquiry-meditation/>

Close your eyes or softly gaze on a point in front of you.

Reflect on a personal intention for your meditation practice today. What do you hope to receive from this practice? Is it to become more peaceful? Cultivate self-compassion? Reset your anxious mind?

Locate the place in your body where you feel your breath rising and falling or where you feel it moving in and out.

Exaggerate the next five rounds of breath so that it is bigger and more expansive.

Notice the places where your breath moves with ease as well as the places where it feels stuck or tight. Just notice sensation — no need to change a thing.

Return your breath to a natural rhythm, focusing your attention on your exhales for the next five to 15 minutes. Each time you get distracted, or realize you haven't been paying attention to your breath, choose to refocus your attention on your next exhale. It is the practice of refocusing that cultivates a calm and steady mind.

Notice any impulse you have to change your experience, and consider the possibility of simply letting things be just as they are for now.

Spend the last five minutes of this practice responding to the following self-inquiry questions in your journal:

- What did you learn about yourself during your meditation practice?
- How does it relate to your grief experience? To the rest of your life?
- Now that you know what you know, is there anything you want to change? To nurture? To be more aware of?

Spend the rest of the day being kind to yourself.



# HARVESTING HOPE

## THE UNEXPECTED BOUNTY OF GRIEF WORK

**I** grew up in rural Tennessee, where I remember riding along with a friend's grandfather on a combine, watching and listening as he maneuvered the large harvester/thresher through a crop of corn (while I got grease on a skirt I shouldn't have been wearing on farm equipment). Joe Taylor and I were 6 years old when we climbed down from the high cab to look at the healthy corn before us. We turned toward the slain stalks that littered the huge tire tracks behind us. His grandfather explained what the machine had accomplished. The combine revolutionized the agricultural industry, combining (it's a pretty sensible name) reaping, threshing and sorting into one action. It also changed what can happen after the harvest — left-behind straw can easily be harvested for cattle feed, soil prepared for the next planting, or allowed to sit for fallow time.

At this stage in my grief journey, how easy it is for me to reflect on harvested fields and feel some pang of kinship. Now, when I think back on the strong plants in the late

afternoon Tennessee sunshine, my adult self wants to consider the reaping and see emptiness. I even want to look ahead to the still-proud stalks and do some kind of corn dance warning, like, "You did all that growing, and you're about to get smashed!" But that's not it at all. The lessons of harvesting are about what the combine does — it's about all that work. It's about moving through, taking what's useful, and caring for the soil that once put forth bountifully. There is comfort in knowing that with proper care it will yield again.

### GATHERING

Almost as soon as we're faced with drastic loss, we begin taking stock. What do we have that's still good? What has been taken from us? As we grieve, we may experience the tendency to try and gather everything we can — stories, photographs, belongings — because we want and need to own it all.

This feeling of wanting to know as much as possible about our loved one will never go

away. Even years down the road, there may be surprise moments when someone offers a previously unknown story, or something will trigger a hidden memory. So many of those moments are wonderful. Many also demonstrate our loved one's humanity. As grief leads us to examine and gather, to know our loved ones as much as we possibly can, we may get more than we bargained for in our search.

As we seek to understand their actions, feelings and love for us, we may discover a new understanding of how much we were loved. We also may be forced to confront things that make us feel misunderstood or limited. When this happens, all that we know to be true may be in doubt.

Our efforts to know everything may result in surprise at how much there is or how much there isn't. We may be frustrated that other family members and friends have parts of a puzzle that aren't apparent to us. We may be unexpectedly sharing our loss with family members we weren't close to, or





didn't know existed. We may find out that our loved ones hid their destructive habits or feelings, that they were dishonest, or that we did not know every single little thing about them.

As we pull proof of life close to us, we take in the entirety of who our loved ones were and what that means. We will consider how to share them in grief just as we shared them in life. Our unanswered questions and the ways that our loved ones played different roles for different people are combined with the rest of what we know about them.

Try to think of those as parts of the larger harvest. Like ears of corn, they're individual — no one question, action, moment or disappointment can tell the whole story. As we gather them to us, we also start to gather ourselves again. We provide context for their lives with our own lives. We look around and see what has happened, all that has grown, and all that we are now holding. And then we start to sort.

## THRESHING AND WINNOWING

The process of sorting is about learning what to keep and what to let go. As we process grief, we learn that there are parts of our grief that will fall away. There are parts of our grief that we can use and there are parts that we can't. Things that cannot be processed or that do not feed our spirits must be discarded. What fuels us forward is the harvest of our grief work. This is the process of threshing.

In agriculture, threshing is about as laborious a process as one can imagine. Hand threshing involved beating the grain with a device called a flail. So, if you feel like you're flailing about it in this process, you're doing it right. Another method was to spread the grain on the floor and have oxen and donkeys walk on it, so if you feel downtrodden, you're also on the right track. Other methods included just putting your grain in the road and letting people's heavy wagon wheels roll over it. Whatever the method, it involved work, weight and a real commitment to sweeping.

Beyond even the need for a good broom (we'll get to that), focus for a minute on the weight. True heaviness was, and still is, required to make something of the harvest. The process involves breaking and loosening. It requires determining what is useful and what is not. Threshing, as it relates to our grief, is a process of figuring out what part of your life, and your loved one's life is the most important.



There are parts of the grief journey, too, that we want to hold — the parts that introduce us to our TAPS family, the parts that remind us of how much we were, and still are loved. We want to keep the parts that inspire growth — the parts that hold kernels of truth, inspiration and power. Loosening these parts from past disappointments, abandonments, failures, mistakes and regrets, anything that does not serve to nourish us, is chaff. These are distractions, unanswerable questions, what-if's and why-did-you's that pull at our minds, but that will never nurture hope. When we do the work of grief and really explore what we need and what we don't, we allow a loosening of the chaff.

There are parts of our grief, and our relationships, that haunt us all. For some of us, it's the last conversation or the last fight; maybe it's a childhood argument. Maybe you regret impatience, missed moments, or that you didn't understand just how sick they were. Perhaps you regret denial; maybe you regret trying to be strong and hiding your feelings. Or possibly you fixate on a small way you let a loved one down; maybe you are angry at stolen futures or embarrassed by the way you treated a loved one, or yourself, in your pain.

A time of harvest means there is an opportunity, no, a mandate, to loosen our hold on this chaff. If we do not loosen the grain from

what is around it, the harvest cannot be useful to us. The problem is that this requires a lot of work. But, the heavier your weight, the closer you are. (And, no, I'm not talking about how many donuts you ate yesterday.)

Once the chaff is separated, winnowing is the process of letting the packaging blow away. Winnowing, in grief, is to allow the hollowness around which we fixate to fall to the wayside. It is to free ourselves of distractions and the parts of our stories that we can't control. It is to keep only that which is useful to the process.

## RESTING FOR GROWTH

Whatever work you've done in your grief, no matter how much you've resisted, you have found the parts of your loved ones that are the most important to you. Maybe you've decided to hold closest the gift of his birth or rediscovered the way she looked at you. Maybe it's children or family, but the best qualities have come forward again to claim the limelight. Or maybe they haven't, and you've found a new strength in yourself. You've grabbed onto the truth of your own story and started to appreciate how loving and missing someone has introduced you to that. Maybe in your grief you've even found some gifts.

After all of this work, don't forget the last part of this process. To complete the harvest season is to recognize the continued need to allow growth. As our grief journeys yield new insights, new strengths, and even new questions and disappointments, they still provide the same promise that soil does. As you move into fall, and as you see the harvests around you, start to think about what you can gather, what you can release, and how you can prepare yourself for new seasons of growth. Clear a swath of land for yourself. Allow yourself to see the promise there — you will grow again.



BY EMILY MUÑOZ

**Strategy & Communications Senior Advisor**  
**Surviving spouse of Army Capt. Gil Muñoz**  
*Emily is living a personal campaign to be the person her late husband loved — and is using the Inner Warrior program to empower survivors to do the same.*

# THE TRUE MEANING OF SACRIFICE

The wearing of names on the back of uniforms is nothing new. It began as a way of identifying a favored player from the cheap seats. It is used today in professional ranks and most college athletic programs. Rarely does it make it to the high school level.

The Corner Canyon High School girls softball team, in Draper, Utah, is bucking that trend and wearing names on the backs of their jerseys. But it isn't an attempt to discern one player from another. Nor is it done for vanity reasons. It is purely selfless, not calling attention to the players themselves.

Instead of their own names, the Chargers uniforms are adorned with the names of Utahns who gave the ultimate sacrifice: fallen soldiers.

"There are a lot of programs out there to bring awareness to different things, and we participate in some of them," Corner Canyon softball coach Garrett Hone said. "This year we wanted something different, something that would honor our military and at the same time perhaps have an impact on our girls."

According to Corner Canyon principal Mary Bailey, the idea for honoring the soldiers came from assistant coach Quinn Linde.

"I had seen a news story on TV where a young football team did something to honor fallen soldiers," Linde said. "The coach had served in Iraq and was finding a way to honor friends he had lost. I thought it was a great idea we could try at the high school level. I thought our girls would benefit from it."



Although Linde never served, he was around veterans, working with them while at Utah Valley University. The idea of honoring fallen soldiers was something he thought Corner Canyon should try.

"I didn't want just a random list of soldiers," Linde said. "I wanted to honor those from Utah."

Once it was approved, Corner Canyon contacted TAPS. Linde first heard of TAPS when he was at Utah Valley University. He knew they offered compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in our Armed Forces. If anyone could help make his idea a reality, TAPS could do

it. After learning about the team's project, Team TAPS Director Marie Campbell contacted families of the fallen from Utah for permission and received enough approvals to uniform the entire team.

The uniforms feature stars on one sleeve and stripes on the other. The soldier's name appears just above the player's number on the back of the uniform. Under the number is the phrase "Fallen, not forgotten."

"This is such an amazing thing for this team to do for us," Christi Barton said. "I can't put into words how wonderful it is that these girls would honor all of our soldiers who they didn't know and aren't family to them."

It's been nearly three years since Barton's son, Zack, died while serving in the Air Force. Zack's name appears on the back of freshman infielder Josee Haycock's uniform.

"When [Haycock] sent me a picture of her in her uniform, I cried," Barton said. "It is so wonderful that they are honoring our sons, daughters, husbands and wives. The coach told me the girls have loved what they are doing and have a deeper appreciation of our military. Keeping Zack's name out there is really important to us, and this is very helpful."

Hone took additional steps to help his Chargers grow from this experience. Making it more than just a token attempt at wearing the uniform, Hone has his girls contact and talk to the families. Many now have strong friendships with them and even consider them family.





“The girls contact their respective families once each week,” Hone said. “Sometimes it is through email, sometimes text and sometimes even a call. I want the girls to understand more about the soldier and their families. Sometimes a family just needs someone there to listen.”

Suzanne Wagstaff agrees. Her son, Matt, died while flying a helicopter in Afghanistan in 2010.

“Sometimes the hardest part about being a Gold Star is so many people are afraid to approach you,” Wagstaff said. “They don’t know what to say and don’t want to offend us. But we want to share our stories about our soldiers. We want to talk.”

Junior Abby Baysinger honors Matt’s name.

“She wanted to know Matt’s story, and I could talk about Matt all day long,” Wagstaff said. “This girl was way excited to learn about him. I love this program. The more we share the memory of our loved ones, the more the memory lives on. Also, with the generation today and the world they live in, it is important that they understand what our freedoms are and about the price paid to keep those freedoms.”

The uniforms are currently being worn only at home games. But the impact for the girls lingers on after the final pitch.

“When I first heard we were going to do it, I thought it was an awesome opportunity,” senior captain Brianna Carroll said. “It is more than I imagined, however. When we wear the uniforms, we actually play better.”

Carroll honors Marine Cpl. Adam Galvez, who died in Iraq in 2006. Carroll has emailed and even called Galvez’s family.

“I have found out what an outstanding soldier and person he was,” Carroll said. “President Bush even spoke of him. When I wear the uniform, I feel like I am playing for him and his family.”

The team has found a way to honor their soldiers even when not in the uniform.

“When we don’t wear the uniforms, we write the names of our soldiers on our arms,” added senior first baseman Madalin Healy. “My soldier’s wife told me my soldier would think this is so cool. We always give it our all, whether we win or lose.”

The team played in a softball tournament in St. George, Utah, in March. Most teams go eat pizza or some other activity before the tournament. This year, Hone and Linde took the girls up in the mountains for a special time to share their fallen heroes’ stories with each other. They spent two hours learning more about sacrifice and its many faces.

With Draper located between Camp Williams and Hill Air Force Base, the Corner Canyon team is used to seeing military uniforms around town. However, the season-long experience of meeting the families, learning their stories and celebrating their lives taught them the true meaning of sacrifice. It also promoted community awareness for America’s fallen heroes and strengthened the relationship with local military families and service-members. Many of whom now attend the Charger games regularly, including a group of 50 to 60 Patriot Guard riders who support the team.

Throughout the season, the parents have been as supportive as the players. After they first heard Linde’s idea, the parents agreed

unanimously that it was a good idea for their daughters to learn about service and sacrifice. But along the way, they also learned more about what it really means to sacrifice.

Haycock’s father contacted Barton after the season ended to tell her his family saw the flag flying while they were on vacation. He said they now understood what it costs for that flag to keep waving. He thanked her for sharing Zack’s story with the Corner Canyon players, parents, students and faculty.

Hone decided the girls will wear the same soldier’s name throughout their careers at Corner Canyon. Next season, the new freshman will receive a match with a fallen hero and their family to carry on the tradition. The families of all the soldiers also attended a home game in May, and the Corner Canyon faculty played the students in a basketball game with the proceeds going to TAPS.

In fact, word is spreading. The Brighton High School soccer team, from the same school district, is going to take up the idea and work with TAPS in the fall. Are you interested in a creative way to raise awareness for our fallen heroes in your community and have a great idea or want to try something like the Chargers? Email [teamtaps@taps.org](mailto:teamtaps@taps.org) to learn more.

**BY RON BEVAN**  
Sports journalist with the Draper City Journal

*\*This item was originally printed in the Draper City Journal and updated for this publication.*

# Khobar

CAPT. CHRISTOPHER ADAMS

TECH SGT. DANIEL CAFOUREK

SGT. MILLARD DEE CAMPBELL

SENIOR AIRMAN EARL CARTRETTE, JR.

TECH. SGT. PATRICK FENNIG

CAPT. LELAND HAUN

MASTER SGT. MICHAEL HEISER

STAFF SGT. KEVIN JOHNSON

STAFF SGT. RONALD KING

MASTER SGT. KENDALL KITSON, JR.

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS CHRISTOPHER LESTER

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS BRENT MARTHALER

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS BRIAN McVEIGH

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS PETER MORGERA

TECH SGT. THANH GUS NGUYEN

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JOSEPH RIMKUS

SENIOR AIRMAN JEREMY TAYLOR

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JUSTIN WOOD

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JOSHUA WOODY



# Towers 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

## Then and Now

**T**APS has provided frontline care and resources to families of the military fallen for 22 years. In 1996, the terrorist bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia took the lives of 19 U.S. Air Force personnel and wounded hundreds more. While an act of cowardice claimed these lives, with acts of courage the surviving families reclaimed their futures. TAPS was there, reaching out with care and compassion, from then until now.

When the bombing occurred, TAPS had been in existence for two years. I lost my husband in the attack. Others lost sons, husbands, uncles and brothers. The fallen were from Eglin, Patrick, Offutt, and Wright-Patterson Air Force Bases. With the families reeling from their loss, Col. Gary Dylewski, Commander of the 33rd Fighter Wing at Eglin AFB, reached out to Bonnie Carroll. Dylewski's wife knew Carroll from a previous assignment and understood the grieving families needed the kind of support TAPS could provide.

Immediately, TAPS reached out to the families and started championing a unified response. In fact, within the first year, Bonnie and other TAPS staff made multiple trips to Florida to meet with families of the fallen and offer them connections to each other, grief resources and care. Some of the families took time before becoming involved with TAPS, and many are still as active today as they were in the early years after the attack. They still receive TAPS publications and know we are there for them if they need us.

For me, it took two years before I actively started participating with TAPS. I just wasn't ready to personally engage with the

activities. But I kept reading the quarterly news journals I received in the mail and eventually attended my first National Military Survivor Seminar. For the first time, I heard people share feelings and thoughts that were so relatable to my own experience of grief. I made friends and started building connections.

Eventually, I became a Peer Mentor, and in October 2000 I ran the Marine Corps Marathon to raise money for TAPS. After that, I was hooked on the run to remember aspect of racing and started Team TAPS as a volunteer. By 2009, I was so involved with Team TAPS that I quit my full-time job to expand the program to new events. I also put my education background to work helping our youngest survivors find healing and courage at Good Grief Camps.

Knowing that the 20th anniversary of the attack was upcoming, I wanted to find a way to welcome other family members and the airmen who served with their fallen loved ones to a special memorial event in Washington, D.C. TAPS rallied with me to host an event that celebrated those who sacrificed their lives 20 years ago. And, we honored all the courageous loved ones who ultimately found hope and healing in a future still rich with possibility.

The 20th Anniversary Remembrance Ceremony, held on July 1, included speeches from FBI director James Comey, one of the lead prosecutors in the 2001 criminal case, and from Retired Lt. Gen. Douglas Robb, the Medical Group Commander in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and the former Director of the Defense Health Agency. More than 100 survivors and guests attended the celebration of those they love and miss. The

ceremony was followed by a wreath laying at the memorial and time for families to share stories of their loved ones.

Most important to me was that those who lost someone in the terror attack would know that all these years later we remember. We remember together. The point of the 20th Anniversary Remembrance Ceremony was to bring us together at an inclusive event so we could look back, reflect and remember in a healing moment.

Many of those who survived that tragic night in Saudi Arabia still hurt and have painful memories of their experience. They were asked to rally for the wounded, return to their missions and lay to rest their battle buddies who served beside them. All these years later, it's still hard for us to acknowledge the profound loss we have shared. It was important for us to come together to share our stories and ultimately find connection and comfort.

At TAPS we know that grief is a long game. It doesn't stop at some magical number of years after our loss. On that morning, as we stood together high on the hill at the Air Force Memorial, the courageous survivors of the Khobar Towers attack recognized there is still healing to be found and comfort to be given as we share our journey.



**BY MARIE CAMPBELL**

**Team TAPS Director, Surviving spouse of Air Force Sgt. Millard Dee Campbell**

*Marie holds both a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Radio/Television/Film and a Masters Degree in Elementary Education. She honors the memory of her husband through her work at TAPS.*

**"TWENTY YEARS, IN SOME RESPECTS, SEEMS LIKE AN ETERNITY, BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE 20 DAYS BECAUSE OUR MEMORY OF THAT NIGHT IS STILL SO CLEAR. THE STING OF LOSS FADES SOMEWHAT OVER TIME, BUT THE MEMORIES OF OUR FALLEN HEROES AND THEIR SACRIFICE REMAINS VIVID."**

**COL. DOUG COCHRAN, USAF, RETIRED, FORMER COMMANDER OF THE 58TH FIGHTER SQUADRON**

# THE JOURNEY OF



# NEVER ENDS

I am surprised at how much grief feels like fear. Nothing has felt the same since April 27, 2011. I spent my entire adult life following Phil around the world. First, I lived in his shadow and then the shadow of my children.

Don't get me wrong, I loved being the glue that held our family together. I was the positive cheerleader standing behind my family. It was a comfortable role that I never saw ending. Living in the shadows also meant that I did not have to consider where I fit in outside my military world.

The day Phil's life ended, I was unwillingly thrust into a new world for which I was unprepared. I was filled with brokenness and terror. Yet, I knew that unless I found a way to move beyond the anger, the consuming hatred for the man who took Phil's life would steal my life as well. Knowing I needed something to motivate me out of my fear and sadness, I looked for the way forward.

Then on one of my lowest days, I came across a bucket list from my 30s. There were six things left.

- › Finishing a marathon in all 50 states
- › Running the Great Wall of China Marathon
- › Writing a book
- › Living in Europe again
- › Running 100 marathons

On that hopeless day, faced with no dreams, I galvanized my inner strength and decided to spend the next five years hammering out that bucket list in hopes that I could learn to live again — this time without Phil. Determining to finish my bucket list was a way to reclaim purpose for my life and honor my husband.

In the dogged pursuit of this list, I fell and skinned my knees — and my heart — many times. Still, by picking myself up and carrying on, I found my reason to live. I also discovered that being happy is a choice. Here are some other key principles I learned along my journey.

## **There Is No Right Way to Grieve**

I thought I knew how to grieve. At first, simple choices helped me find my way through the grief. I went back to work five



days after Phil was buried so that for nine hours a day I could think of something other than Phil's death. I ran because it helped me make sense of my life. Running also allowed me to cautiously feel on a primitive level. That gave me the clarity to write about my feelings of loss and hurt. My writings became a cathartic journal in which I worked through the unfairness of Phil's death. It was a beginning step on my grief journey.

People have all sorts of ideas about the proper way to grieve. Most people believe there is a time frame for grief. I thought the second year would be easier, but it was much harder. I emerged from the fog faced with big life decisions I had been avoiding.

Some people think there is a magic formula to help with the pain. They think alcohol helps or that those grieving need to move close to family. Some widows/widowers hurry into a relationship thinking that it will lessen the pain. All of these options only offer temporary relief. In the long run, we may hurt even more.

I had many people tell me how I should grieve and what I should do, but in trusting myself and making choices that were right for me, I found my footing. While there were many naysayers in my circle, I chose to do what I could and to trust myself even when I was afraid. Ultimately, learning to trust our own instincts in the face of criticism and skepticism is the goal on our healing journey.

### Live Your Dreams

Phil never was able to realize his dreams. But after his death, I didn't even know what my dreams were anymore. Completing marathons in all 50 states had been Phil's idea for me in the first place. He wanted me to find something to occupy my time and carry me during the empty nest transition and as he worked long hours. When he was killed, I only had 32 states marked off the list. I felt paralyzed by fear and unable to discern whether the marathons and bucket list were my dream or Phil's.

Ultimately, the real grief work started with the running. Even when I could barely stand up from the weight of the sorrow, running was a natural choice for me. Through the miles, my running got me out of the house and to races where I had to socialize. It became a way to live my dreams and work through the fear, anger and resentment over a life cut short.

That singular choice also gave me a path to remember and honor Phil. Across the long, grueling miles, I found myself again — the Linda I like to be. In the decision to get my feet on the ground for the past five years, I have now completed 101 marathons in all 50 states. It was my dream after all.

### Take Chances

Take chances even when everything in you wants to close your eyes and quit or run away. Fear was the biggest emotion I faced aside from the gut-wrenching pain in the early days. Heck, I'm still afraid. But by completing things on my bucket list, I have been able to face my fears daily. They don't rule my life. I choose to be happy. I choose not to quit. I choose to take a chance.

# 12

## SIMPLE LESSONS FOR YOUR GRIEF JOURNEY

1. You are going to fall. Get back up with bloodied knees and carry on. The journey is too short and worthwhile to quit.
2. Dare to dream and believe in yourself.
3. Make a leap of faith for something that makes absolutely no sense. Big risks have big payouts.
4. Stop waiting for life to happen. Staying in the harbor is safe, but there is no life in that.
5. Life is meant to be loved and celebrated. Friends matter.
6. Tell people how you feel and why they matter even when they cannot do the same. The relationship is more important than being right.
7. Being loved is the best gift of all. It is OK to love again and to be loved.
8. Commit to a goal and make it happen.
9. Believe that the journey is not over — it has just begun.
10. Happiness is a (hard fought) choice.
11. Face your fears and regain control over your life.
12. Life is different. You are different.

**On that hopeless day, faced with no dreams, I galvanized my inner strength and decided to spend the next five years hammering out that bucket list in hopes that I could learn to live again — this time without Phil.**



China required me to face my fears on every single level. I traveled to a foreign country, ran a brutal race, and I met people — friends now — from all over the world on my own. In doggedly pursuing the completion of my dream, I continued to trust my decisions and actions even when other questioned what I was doing.

When I finally ran the 5,194 steps of the Great Wall of China, I found them to be as steep, uneven, dangerous and difficult to navigate as I feared. Only by keeping my head in the game and focusing on the step in front of me was I able to complete the race. In spite of stumbles, I completed the journey. The race wasn't easy, but it was worth taking a chance to learn to trust myself — the hardest thing of all.

### Try New Things and Go New Places

2016 has been the year of getting off the couch. That had nothing to do with exercise but everything to do with learning to thrive versus trying to survive. After five years, I realized that I had no life. I worked, ran, attended school and volunteered. I was only surviving my story. I wasn't enjoying life. I needed to learn to have fun again.

Even if trauma and tragedy had rendered me unable to move forward in the beginning, I decided to force myself out of the house and onto the course every day. It gave me a renewed sense of power as there was no choice to retreat. Everything on the bucket list required me to get out there and run. I needed to live my dreams, if only to thumb my nose at the person who killed my husband and took all of Phil's dreams.

In the past eight months, I opened myself up to the untapped potential in my life. I faced down the beast of indecision and the ease of staying mired in the shroud of loneliness and sadness. China was part of this process. I went alone to a country where I had never been and knew no one. I didn't know the language or the customs, and I had to push my physical limits in a country where medical treatment would have been difficult.

Who knew what joy would come from simply showing up and taking that leap of faith? My enjoyment of life expanded to new places and beyond the limits of my normal comfort zone. It was hard to take the first step, but worth trying something new.

### It Takes a Village

From the start, I was lost. I simply no longer fit in my world. Then TAPS gave me a

**In the past eight months, I opened myself up to the untapped potential in my life. I faced down the beast of indecision and the ease of staying mired in the shroud of loneliness and sadness.**

new family, one that understands like no other what it means to lose a spouse, a military community and identity, and a family. While my journey is unique, I derive confidence and support from those farther along in the journey. I find comfort in knowing that I am not alone in the slow path toward healing.

The best part is that the TAPS family is everywhere. When I was in Germany a few months after Phil's death, TAPS still found me. They gave me a local mentor who shared a similar experience. It meant everything to know they were walking beside me in the emotions of my loss. As my journey expanded to states and continents, I knew that even if my fellow surviving widows were not physically running the race with me, they were with me in spirit and faith for every step of my journey of hope.



**BY LINDA AMBARD**

**Surviving spouse of  
Air Force Maj. Philip Ambard**

*Linda writes for many military publications about post-traumatic growth, youth resiliency and military survivor issues. She was recognized in 2015 by the White House for her advocacy.*



# Attending Funerals After Loss

"Trust your grief skills and allow yourself to breathe in the sacred space where we honor those who are gone too soon from our lives but never our hearts."

When our hearts are newly broken and the magnitude of our losses seems insurmountable, it is hard to think beyond the surreal moments of our own hero's memorial service, wake or funeral. Whether your loved one is laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery or under a tall oak in the family cemetery plot, that location and experience is consuming. You feel as if you will never attend another funeral again. How could you? It would open fresh wounds and require an effort of composure that seems impossible.

And then your best friend's mother passes away after a battle with cancer. Or children in your son's school are lost in a house fire. Some new loss enters your life, and you are faced with the dilemma of attending the funeral or taking a pass. What is a survivor to do?

At TAPS, we first encourage you to do what is right for your heart. If you are not ready to walk into that space again, then don't. Reach out to the family and send heartfelt condolences. Allow your own grief experience to give you new empathy for how their family is reeling from loss. No need to compare the grief. It's not more or less than yours, but rather shared. And, as long as you honor the life and memory of your friend or family member, their loved ones will most likely understand if you cannot bring yourself to attend the service.

Still, there will be situations where you feel you cannot escape the requirement to attend and show support and compassion for those grieving their own loved one. Or perhaps you simply feel that you are now up to the task and need to rejoin this time-honored tradition of saying farewell to a life.

Here are some experiences our survivors shared recently in a Saturday Morning Message about choosing to attend funerals or not and how they handle the experience. They represent the gamut of feelings and can serve as a starting place in your own decision making.

We hope they will also give you strength to walk into this sometimes uncomfortable

situation knowing that you are loved and supported in a way that makes you capable of seeing it unfold in a new light. The truth that rises to the top? We are all going to face subsequent loss in our lives, and we cannot run from it. Trust your grief skills and allow yourself to breathe in the sacred space where we honor those who are gone too soon from our lives but never our hearts.

★ **From Annette, mother of Joseph:**

I have been to many wakes. When it is the natural order of life, it doesn't seem to bother me. However, there have been two recently for young men we know. One was even in the same funeral home as Joe's wake. I could not bring myself to go to either, and I know it was understood. I went to the Mass for one, and that was a challenge in itself. To see the mom fall apart just about killed me. I offered to speak to her but so far have not really had an answer. When she is ready, if she wants to speak, I will be there for her.

★ **From Robert, father of Louis:**

We go. The families invariably tell us that we don't have to, but these are the same people who came out to support us. It can be difficult, especially when it's someone's child. We don't stay long, except for someone in our family.

★ **From Valerie, mother of Kevin:**

When there is a funeral or calling hours, I go and just say I am sorry. I do not use platitudes or say, "Call me if you need anything." I listen and allow them to talk about the person who died. If it is a close friend, I will just go to the house with food or groceries to leave them. I don't ask. I just do what helped me when my son was killed six years ago this August.

★ **From Diane, mother of Caleb:**

Funerals are tough. Two of my very dear friends have passed, as well as my father-in-law, since Caleb left this world. Of course, I went to their services, as hard as it was. My next-door neighbor just passed away, and I will go to his service. We've been neighbors for almost 20 years. For me, there is no easy way to approach funerals, no mantra that makes them any easier.

I just know I have to go, and so I do. I go to honor their lives. I inhale deeply, exhale and repeat, taking many deep breaths. I pray for strength to make it through. My husband is a wonderful support. I hold his hand tightly and sit close to him; it helps to know he is near. And that's how I approach the funerals of loved ones and friends after our own loss.

★ **From Vivian, daughter of Don:**

My dad's service was unconventional with no casket, no urn and no remembrance photo. It created some anxiety for me because I craved those ritual trappings of the service. But, oh, were there flowers. The smell of them was intoxicating. Afterward, I would wake in the middle of the night feeling as if I could still smell the arrangements. I was petrified before a recent memorial service that the smell of the flowers would unhinge me. Instead, I found strength from the aroma of the similar blooms. It brought back my grief, but it also made me aware that my friend was probably struggling with the same thing. That opened the door for us to share a common thing and tiptoe into the realm of heart-sharing. She eventually opened up and confessed that she had not yet been able to walk to the casket and see her brother. I was able to walk with her only because I knew how important it was to have a companion in these hard moments. She didn't need my lessons. She needed me to be present. It was easier than I thought once I realized it wasn't just about me.

To sign up for the Saturday Morning Message email [smm@taps.org](mailto:smm@taps.org).



# Hands Over Hearts: US Olympians Honor Fallen Heroes

**R**ight hand on heart place.

We hear the first note of the National Anthem, direct our gaze to the Stars and Stripes and, for a moment, we silently and proudly honor our country. With our right hand on heart place. Holding close the memory of what we honor and celebrate. It's what we do.

When the American flag is raised high in honor of a competition won, it marks a dream becoming reality. Our hearts fill with pride for these committed athletes who trained and sacrificed for years to accomplish a moment like this. We recognize, in a beautifully patriotic way, the joy and celebration in the sporting arena and the power of the human spirit that exists to break records, honor a nation and bring home gold.

The world watched more than 500 American athletes compete at the Summer Olympics in Rio, and 121 of those athletes brought home a medal. They competed for America, the same country our heroes died serving. In a uniform of a different kind, these ath-

letes brought joy to our country. More importantly, many Olympians found special meaning as our flag was hoisted for the medal ceremony. Hands over their hearts. Honoring the fallen heroes our TAPS families hold dear.

We know firsthand that they too trained for years and then made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of America. They didn't climb to the top of a medal stand and put their right hand over their hearts in Rio, but they were there and are with us in spirit every single day.

Over the summer, in partnership with USA Basketball, TAPS survivors were part of the USAB Showcase and Road to Rio games in five cities across America prior to the teams departing for the Olympic Games.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski and Coach Geno Auriemma, along with the USAB leadership, invited families to be a part of team meetings, practices,

games and special events. They talked with the teams about TAPS and the honor and sacrifice our heroes and their families have made. Beautiful moments were created in every city along the Road to Rio as TAPS children stood with the teams for the national anthem. Right hand on heart place. Honoring sacrifice. Honoring our fallen heroes.

One TAPS father who met Team USA in Las Vegas remembered the last conversation he had with his son, Tray Daniel, before he died in Kuwait. They talked about the NBA Finals and who would win. In the desert



*Inset: Jaxon Daniel realized his dream of meeting players from his brother's favorite team, the Golden State Warriors.*

*USAB players and TAPS surviving children render honors during the National Anthem in Chicago.*





Clippers center DeAndre Jordan carried a photo button of Tray Daniel to Rio.



Above: Lizzy Yaggy had the opportunity to be a ball kid for the USA Basketball Men's National Team.

heat, surviving father Chris Daniel, was able to meet and talk with the team and honor his fallen son with the sports heroes his son cheered for. Chris was also able to bring his younger son, Jaxon, to share in the joy of celebrating American athletes and create new traditions of honor as a surviving sibling.

Cut to California where USAB players met TAPS kids and stood on the court with them for the national anthem. They were also invited on court during warmups as ball kids for the players. Children who won't grow up with their military loved one to shoot hoops with them were able to chase stray balls for the preeminent players of our day. More importantly, these players took time on the sidelines to learn about each TAPS hero.

In Chicago, a concept born in the heart of retired General Martin Dempsey, 18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, TAPS board member and now an adviser to the NBA, came to life. A very special exchange took place. Each survivor in atten-

dance presented a photo button of a fallen hero to a player from the USA Basketball Men's National Team or member of the delegation for them to take to Rio. In return, our survivors received a USAB challenge coin and a hug, warm smile and the words, "thank you." The Women's National Team did a similar exchange the following evening at the game in Bridgeport, Connecticut. After a final game on American soil and a farewell event in Houston, the players and coaches were off to Rio.

"I cannot express to you all what joy you have brought to our broken home. My kids were the happiest I have ever seen them! The only thing I can compare this experience you gave them to was if you were to bring their father back and put him in front of them. They cried, they laughed, they smiled like I remember when he was alive. A moment of real life was back in their eyes. I thought it was forever lost. I say this and write it to you with humble emotion and tears in my eyes. We love you TAPS! Thank you for all you do for people who have to survive with a broken heart everyday. Thank you for bringing them all they need to be a SURVIVOR! TAPS you give your ALL to families, and I thank your full compassionate circle of workers and volunteers who work so hard for people who need you most! In the words of Tina Turner, 'You're Simply The Best!' Love, **The Rodgers Family**"



The USA Basketball Women's National Team participates in a coin and button exchange with TAPS survivors.



Forty-five fallen heroes went to Rio with our Olympians. They comprised a reserve bench of soldiers, airmen, Coast guardsmen, Marines and sailors. Dempsey was present for the photo button and coin exchange. He stood proudly holding the hand of a TAPS child and watched as images of the heroes in our heart were presented to our heroes on the court. He also talked privately at length with the team about TAPS, our heroes, and the importance of remembering and honoring all those who have served and died and supporting the families they left behind. He told them, "There is nothing we can do for a survivor to replace the loss, but what we can do is we can work to replace the painful memories that they have with new memories, memories like today where some of these young men and women have met their heroes."

General Dempsey later introduced Bonnie Carroll to the team. She shared from her own broken heart what it means to the 60,000 surviving family members in the TAPS family. She wanted the players and coaches to understand that the 45 reserve team members they carried with them represent all our TAPS family — all of those who died in service and those who love them. Seeing the faces of the fallen and reading their names and stories was humbling, and spending time with the survivors was powerful for the players.

"I met a kid. His uncle, Frederick Vasquez, died while protecting our country. He wanted me to have this (holds up the photo button) to take this over to Rio, and it was probably one of the best moments I've had," said Kevin Durant, USAB team member and Golden State Warriors forward in a USAB video.

We know that our heroes will never be forgotten; their life and legacy will live on in the hearts of those they touched. "Those who have fallen have protected our freedom; it's something bigger that we're playing for," said Kyrie Irving, USAB team member and Cleveland Cavaliers guard, in the same interview.

The Road to Rio deepened an already strong TAPS relationship with the NBA, WNBA and USAB. When the USA Basketball Men's and Women's teams took home Olympic gold and the flag flew in Rio, it was beautiful to see every member of the team have their right hand on heart place during the national anthem. We know our heroes are in our hearts, and now we know they were in the players' hearts, too.

*Above Right: Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Martin Dempsey proudly sports the Gold Medal won by Sylvia Fowles, who was in turn wearing a photo button of a TAPS hero.*



**BY DIANA HOSFORD**  
teams4taps Director

Diana leads a program that offers surviving families a way to honor their heroes and create new memories by connecting them to pro sports teams. To learn more, visit [www.taps.org/teams4taps](http://www.taps.org/teams4taps).

# IN THE KITCHEN

Our family grief plays out in the kitchen.

We discovered early in our grief that when I attempted tasks in the kitchen they often resulted in something burning. I would start a meal, fire up the stove and soon discover, from the other side of the house, that I had forgotten about the culinary effort started only minutes before. Many a pot full of charred, best-intention delicacies were left outside the back door. I hoped that Tom wouldn't notice as I tried again to prepare the night's meal.

After a few months, I started wondering what was wrong with me that I couldn't pull myself together in the kitchen. I ran my kitchen successfully for 30 years. I fed the family and even threw a few successful dinner parties along the way. Yet, I continued to wander away from the kitchen to another room during meal prep or became engrossed in another project when I needed to finish the roast. Shamefully, this led to another burned meal.

Tom likes to eat food that isn't burned, so he soon took over in the kitchen since my efforts weren't producing many edible meals.

He's a great cook, and I also like to eat, so I didn't mind.

As Tom began to take over in the kitchen, his engineer mind needed to organize the pantry a little differently. And then a little more and then a little bit more. Until one day, I didn't even recognize my own pantry.

Now, I have to ask where he keeps the so and so. He does all the shopping each Saturday morning using his five pads of paper on the counter: one for each store he plans to visit. He knows which store has the best price and selection for each item. Occasionally, I feel guilty that he's doing all the work, and I offer to pick up grocery items during the week. He declines the offer.

He lets me help in the kitchen now but often explains why we're using this product instead of that, why we put the margarine here instead of there and which cutting board we're using for what. He repeats explanations every couple of days, reminding me of the new policies involved in washing wine glasses, rotating stock in the pantry and where this item now lives in the fridge and why.

This sounds like something that would drive a woman mad in her own kitchen. Thankfully, my sweet therapist helped me understand what is happening in our kitchen. You see, the kitchen is the heart of the home. It is where many of my memories live of daily life with David and Karen. It is the snapshot location where my mental images of them exist. It is a constant reminder that my heart has been torn apart.

No wonder I chose to flee my own kitchen. My heart is trying to drag me away from the pot simmering on the stove. It wants to distract me with an easier memory somewhere else in the house. Meanwhile, my pot runs dry and begins to burn. The acrid-smelling results of my inattention call me back to the kitchen. I'm forced to face this place of my grief. It cannot be avoided.

This ritual plays out a lot in my house. Sometimes, my anger and frustration find an outlet as I hurl the smoking pan across the backyard, just as I tossed it the day before. Tom comes home from work with no dinner on the table and (gently) takes over in the kitchen. For him, the kitchen and his new systems represent control. He had no control over David and Karen's murder, but in helping me he is able to regain his footing in a home that is forever changed.

Our grief created a monster in our kitchen. Someday, we will hopefully find ourselves cooking together and remembering only the happy times spent in that space. For now, we perfect this flip-flopped household task of feeding ourselves. And, the bonus is that we don't starve.

AFTER A FEW MONTHS, I STARTED WONDERING WHAT WAS WRONG WITH ME THAT I COULDN'T PULL MYSELF TOGETHER IN THE KITCHEN. I RAN MY KITCHEN SUCCESSFULLY FOR 30 YEARS.



BY PATTY REIS

Surviving mother of Navy Lt. j.g.  
David Andrew Reis and Karen Elizabeth Reis

# TRANSITIONS: EMBRACING THE POTENTIAL

The landscapers came to my home yesterday. They came in like an unexpected storm — a whirlwind of activity trying to put some level of organization to all the yard's chaos. They have these loud machines that force a blast of air onto an object and catapult it into the air with the goal of moving that item of disorganization into a new, desired location.

Five years ago, life was neat. It was organized and predictable. My parents served as my landscapers, carefully crafting a plan for me. My life was groomed like our lawn — ordered, nice to look at and full of fun times. Nearly perfect. There were a few weeds that would sneak in here and there, but Dad would knock them out as soon as they sprouted — both in our lawn and in my life.

My dad, Col. David McCracken, died Sept. 2, 2011, after an 11-month battle with brain cancer. He came home sick from Iraq, complaining of headaches. My older brother, sister and I watched as he declined and became less strong, less sharp and less aware — but always, still my dad.

I was in sixth grade when we received the news of his cancer and had just started seventh grade when he died. I was unexpectedly blown into the air like one of those stray leaves in my yard. I had no idea where I'd land.

I transferred schools three weeks after my father's death. Believe it or not, I was happy about it. I had more friends in my new school, and most of them didn't know what I'd been through. I liked that. There is a discomfort that surrounds you when you talk to others about your grief; they don't know how to react or what to say. I try to avoid these interactions at all cost.

I began to accept a few opportunities that came my way (I get that from my mom), from being the middle school mascot to joining the broadcasting team, finding a brotherhood with my high school Air Force JROTC program to serving as president of my student body's Technology Student Association. I tried a little bit of everything just to see where I fit. I needed to fit in. All kids have fathers, but I have lost mine. How do I make my way fatherless?

We found TAPS about a year after my father died, maybe a little sooner, but my mom wasn't ready to take that step. We eventually made it to our first event in Pensacola, Florida. I was amazed that not only were there others like me but I could share my grief with them and they actually understood.

There are people who will step into your life. They will take hold, and they will help you through the turbulence. TAPS has brought many special people into my life: friends who I've made through Good Grief Camps, outstanding leaders and mentors. My mentor, Rick Pyatt, is a former Air Force officer who has become an extension of my family. Our relationship is something I never thought I'd have. He has provided an ear when I needed to talk and exposure to new and amazing experiences. He also inspired me to apply (and hopefully attend) the U.S. Air Force Academy. My sister, Mattie, has also had people step into her life, encouraging her to be the best student and athlete that she can be. Her softball coach, Chad Floyd, has been walking alongside her through this journey, developing an amazingly supportive team whose sole focus isn't on winning. It's about creating memories and events that she'll remember for the rest of her life.

**I'VE BEEN REMINDED THAT TAPS TRULY CARES. THEY WANT MY FAMILY AND ME TO HEAL AND SEE THE TRANSFORMATION FROM CHAOS TO HOPE.**

*Mattie McCracken and her softball coach, Chad Floyd.*



*Tammy and Connor McCracken at the Atlanta Survivor Seminar.*



*Connor often reads the letter his father wrote him.*





*Connor introduced General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the TAPS Gala in April.*

**WE MUST LET GO OF THE LIFE WE HAVE PLANNED,  
SO AS TO ACCEPT THE ONE THAT IS WAITING FOR US.**

Reflecting this summer over what could be my last Good Grief Camp at the National Military Survivor Seminar, I've been reminded that TAPS truly cares. They want my family and me to heal and see the transformation from chaos to hope. I am continually in awe and, at the same time, uplifted by the hands that reach down to my family and me. From supporting my pursuit to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy to knowing that they are there for me when I experience stressful moments, my TAPS family has helped prepare me for the transition ahead.

I still have work to do. I have to work on gaining the courage to share my story, share my dad's story and navigate that zone of discomfort that is caused by telling my own story of grief. My dad was so many things — a mentor, soldier, leader, educator, exuberant sports fan and an outstanding father. I no longer have one man who fills those roles

for me but a fellowship of folks who have stepped into my life to close the gaps.

My father left me a letter before he deployed to Iraq. It was lost for some time and recently found. I'll treasure it always. In the letter he said, "My Connor, When I was a young man I dreamt about having a son that I would name Connor. And then one day you came into my life and made all my dreams come true. You are far better than even the Connor I dreamt about."

I have a new appreciation for landscaper's never-ending battle to create order in all the chaos. As a leaf, I don't know where I'll end up and sometimes I'm not comfortable with the ride, but I'll embrace it. I know that I'll land somewhere safe. My family and I have a support network that we never expected, filled with mentorship, love and leadership — just a few of the qualities that my dad wanted for us. These people believe in us and we in them.

Joseph Campbell perhaps said it best, "We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us."



**BY CONNOR MCCRACKEN**  
**Surviving son of Army Col. David McCracken**  
*Connor is a Senior at Sandy Creek High School in Tyrone, Georgia. He plans to pursue aerospace engineering upon graduation. He is President of the Student Technology Association, a fourth year AFJROTC student and both swims and plays golf for his school.*

# Grief Grappling: Fighting for a New Normal

There is tremendous shock, confusion and even denial that accompanies sudden death. It is equally traumatic to watch the prolonged suffering of those you love. Regardless of how grief comes for you, it will. It is the great, dark hunter. You can't ignore grief. It tracks you down and demands its rightful share of your life, no matter what the circumstance.

Back in the early days, I was simply learning how to tell my story. I struggled to put into words what had happened to my loved ones and how to explain what had happened to my life. I felt as if each day were a long tournament because I never knew exactly how the opponent would present itself. As time progressed, I realized that the daily matches are actually training for the larger event of living without your loved one. Every day, there is some part of grief we must face in order to prepare for the next weeks and months. I might as well understand that I'm in a match where grief is my opponent for life. But my life can still be happy, hopeful and full of love.

## Grief Is An Equalizer

The recent Olympic games opened doors for us to see different styles of training, competition and triumph. People came from all points of the globe, bringing different cultures, traditions, languages, politics, faiths, obstacles and ideas to compete. Consider how this ties in with our own views of grief.

By now, we've learned that death does not discriminate — everyone experiences it at some point. When it finally touches our lives, we don't all grieve the same; therefore, we don't always speak the same grief language. But our objective is the same — to get healthy and learn how to fully live again in the shadow of our losses.

## Step On The Mat

There will be days when you will feel strong and as if you can take on grief with no training. Maybe your grief shows up for an early workout session, and it seems easy. However, there are plenty of days when grief waits for us with a surprise training round late in the day when we are tired and weak. Some days we will best it, but other days it may get the best of us. This is OK.

Every day, there is  
some part of grief we  
must face in order to prepare  
for the next weeks and months.

The point is that we step on the mat. We get stronger every time we learn to face the way our lives have changed. And we increase our stamina in knowing that while grief changed us, it only won the round, not the tournament.





## Finding Inspiration

Olympic training is about absolute commitment, strength and courage. It is inspirational. What an example of wanting something so badly that you spend hours every day training. The athletes represented in Rio worked tirelessly for their success, trained for it and sacrificed for the opportunity to compete. Can we do any less to honor our heroes?

Nope. That's exactly what we have to do. Now we need to focus on daily training because grief grappling is not for the faint of heart.

## TAPS Is On Your Team

As any good athlete knows, in order to get through a multi-day event, marathon or other ultra sport, you need a support team around you. This is true even though it may feel as if our grief is an individual sport. We all need trainers, doctors, coaches and, most importantly, our fans. These are the folks you don't have to pay to support you. Their love and commitment to your healing puts them fully on your team.

TAPS is also there for you. Whether they are on the other end of the 24/7 Helpline or welcoming you to survivor events, your TAPS family knows the grief journey is a marathon, not a sprint. They are there to cheer you on as you work daily to heal and find your way.

TAPS resources are designed for people at all training levels, so don't be afraid to reach out. Don't try to be a superstar and go it alone. You'll burn out quickly. You need people. We need each other even in the calm moments when we aren't grieving.

Sometimes, pride or insecurity may get in your way, but even Olympians have coaches and trainers helping them prepare for and compete at their level. This is your opportunity to receive expert coaching and encouragement. You will definitely have the opportunity to pay it forward, I guarantee.

## It's OK To Take A Knee

Special dates, memorable occasions and holidays can all leave us depleted and tired. That is why we need to work daily to own our grief and build our stamina for the times when the loss and heartache wash over us. It's all right if there are days when you need to take a knee. In those moments, carve out just a bit of time for personal reflection and affirmation. This is one event

for which there is a prize just for waking up to face another day.

## Take The Round

Loss will be with us forever. But our loved ones are also with us forever. This assurance helps us continue to commit to making our days better, even when they're hard. Is our training regimen helping us improve and reach our personal best? Hopefully, with regular grief work, you will find more days when you take the round. And, as I've found, sometimes the punches just keep coming. As soon as we face one loss, another seems to come. It's OK to acknowledge the difficult times as well as the ways you've found to be your own basic coping skills. Pretty soon, you'll be refreshed and ready to face the next layer of thoughts, hurt and uncertainty.

In the TAPS family, you'll see people at all stages in the grief process. It may be too overwhelming to know how deep the field goes. We might start to lose hope, or we may be newly encouraged when we can step back, lower the pressure, and take it one round, or day, at a time.

## A New Understanding of Victory

Grief has no finish line, so we must commit to establishing a pace that is comfortable, and sustainable. The goal is to be present, to participate in the journey and to strive alongside other survivors. We'll become more mentally, spiritually and emotionally fit, and it will be worth all the hard work. Our spirits will feel lighter and more joyful as we re-evaluate what it means to triumph through grief, if not "over" it.

So, if we see each other grappling with grief and it looks as if we're having trouble, reach out. The support of our team guarantees that we'll keep trying. The most painful events we experience can motivate us to become stronger, wiser and more resilient. Isn't that victory?



**BY SANDRA EGTS**  
Surviving mother of  
Marine Lance Cpl. Adam James White

# Sweeping Out the Cobwebs

Thoughts from the Author...

I tend to spend part of the fall season looking over the past year and taking stock. I reflect on this crazy existence by writing, by sweeping out the cobwebs in my my mind, by reflecting on what I have learned about life, love and loss.

Twenty-two months ago, my husband kissed me for the last time before succumbing to complications of lung cancer. It seems like it was yesterday; it seems like forever. I miss him more as time goes by.

I found this to also be true after losing my dad and grandmother, who both suffered for a period prior to their deaths. My dad suffered debilitating strokes in the last year and a half of his life. Grandma's decline was over about three years. It took some time for all the good, pretty memories to overcome the sadness, pain, changes and suffering that were present at the end.

And, on the other hand, the very sudden deaths of my mother and son cut like a knife from the start. My mother showed no signs of illness when she died from sudden cardiac arrest at 62. My son was 33 when he died unexpectedly from service-related injuries.

These multiple rounds of grief have driven me to face my grief in a new way and formulate a plan to deal with this new normal. Weary with loss, I'm still working hard to embrace grief, give it its due and move past changes I never anticipated.



# What to Expect at a Seminar

In our grief, it can be difficult to imagine traveling to an event along with other bereaved survivors, many of whom are strangers, where the focus is on addressing our innermost pain in hopes of healing. And, yet, that is what happens when attending a TAPS Survivor Seminar.

An understanding about what to expect in advance of attending can often ease emotions for first-time participants and your TAPS family wants you to know you are not alone, as these are questions many survivors often have prior to attending. We know nothing can alleviate the pain of loss, but our staff does everything possible to promote an atmosphere of care, support and healing through the grief work, while connecting you with fellow survivors who understand the nature of grieving a military loss.

It can feel overwhelming to walk into unknown territory, but from the moment

you arrive, you will be surrounded by the love and care of TAPS family. You will put faces to the names of some of us with whom you have already been in contact. As fellow survivors, we will be there to walk by your side.

There may be people hugging, crying and perhaps, even smiling or laughing — because they are grateful to be back in a safe place to grieve in the company of fellow survivors who "get it." For many, this is the one place they can be authentic in their grief and feel a deep connection others.

At check-in, we will greet you, give you materials, an event program, an event T-shirt and a photo button of your loved one if you chose to submit one. The photo button may bring up emotions, but we are here to support you and love to hear about each other's fallen heroes. These photos are often showcased in either slideshows

or banners at the event as a sacred way to honor the memories of our loved ones.

There will be workshops for understanding and processing grief as well as smaller sharing group sessions where you can connect with peers. Nobody is forced to talk, but we encourage people to participate at their own comfort level to get the most out of the event.

Some of the most courageous and compassionate people you could ever meet will be there with you. To be sure, there will be tears, but they fall in the shadow of hugs and love. In time, there will be smiles as we rejoice in the memory of our loved ones.

We hope you will come to find, like so many others, a transformation that happens from the time you arrive to the time you depart. That you will leave having found some level of comfort knowing you are not alone in your grief. TAPS Seminars give you space to feel



# 2016 Calendar of Events

It is hard to explain in words, the feelings that come from attending a TAPS Seminar, but people often describe how they had to experience the event first hand to truly understand how helpful it would be.

the encouragement and hope that your heart can heal and pride in sharing the life of your loved one with others who are here to honor them with you.

It is hard to explain in words the feelings that come from attending a TAPS Seminar, but people often describe how they had to experience the event firsthand to truly understand how helpful it would be. It can often balance out the hesitation and concerns to know you will arrive at a safe home for your grief, where TAPS has done everything to create an event filled with love, support, healing and hope.

On behalf of our TAPS Seminars team, we look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming events where you will be embraced by your TAPS family with care.



**BY DR. CARLA STUMPF PATTON**  
Surviving spouse of Marine Sgt. Richard Stumpf  
Carla holds a Ph.D. in Education Counseling Psychology and is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, National Certified Counselor, Certified Fellow Thanatologist and Certified Clinical Trauma Professional. She is the Suicide Survivor Services Manager at TAPS.

## OCTOBER

- ★ Inner Warrior Ragnar Trail Carolinas  
October 7-8 • Charlotte, NC
- ★ Hawaii Women's Empowerment Retreat  
October 8-15 • Moloka'i, HI\*
- ★ Los Angeles Widows Getaway  
October 12-15 • Los Angeles, CA\*
- ★ Dude Ranch All Population Retreat  
October 16-21 • Raymer, CO

## NOVEMBER

- ★ TAPS United Kingdom All Population Gathering  
November 9-15 • London, England\*
- ★ Charleston Moms Retreat  
November 16-20 • Charleston, SC\*
- ★ Mid-Atlantic Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
November 18-20 • Baltimore, MD

## DECEMBER

- ★ New England Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
December 2-4 • Cromwell, CT

Visit [www.taps.org/events](http://www.taps.org/events) for a full 2016 schedule.

\* Note: These events are either closed or on a waitlist. If you see an event you are interested in attending, but registration is full visit [www.taps.org/events](http://www.taps.org/events) regularly as 2017 events will be announced soon. As a reminder, registration and applications for most events open three months or more in advance. Be sure to sign up early for 2017 events.

Text TAPS to 95577 to sign up to receive event alerts and reminders from TAPS.



# Putting for Hope

## Golf Tournaments Raise Mission Awareness

Many of our families lay their loved ones to rest in hallowed grounds across the country. Perfectly manicured green lawns and lush landscapes. Hushed tones lend a sense of reverence. There are flowers and headstones marking their lives and our love. Paths lead us to sit with them for a while as we contemplate the memories and even shed tears of grief.

On a different type of manicured green, teams in 15 states practice putting and queue up for shotgun starts in golf tournaments supporting TAPS families. The seven-month golf season is the perfect backdrop for corporate and community partners to come together to promote awareness and raise funds for the TAPS mission. Organizations such as GRSi, Aimco, Kindness General Contractors Inc., Land of the Free, Naval Postgraduate School and 10 others raise close to \$1 million dollars a year at their tournaments. Some feature TAPS as a sole beneficiary while others share their proceeds with other nonprofits.

Peter Cannito, President and CEO of EOIR Technologies, feels that hosting their annual golf outing for the past eight years to benefit TAPS aligns with both their corporate responsibility and business missions. As a large defense industry corporation, many of their employees are prior service, they work with the military daily and recognize the tremendous sacrifices TAPS families make. What started as a \$5,000 yearly event is now closing in on the \$100,000 marker and has a waiting list for teams to play.

For the players and employees who support the tournament, it's not just a cause anymore. Bonnie Carroll and other TAPS survivors have embraced EOIR into the TAPS family at the golf outing and other events throughout the year. This inspired the organization to seek new opportunities to support military families such as sponsoring their first Army Ten-Miler team in October 2016.

Cannito served in the Marine Corps and says supporting TAPS brings EOIR employees together as they focus on the faces and stories of military survivors. He recounts how he met Erin Yaggy a few years ago at the golf outing.

Her husband was a Marine Corps pilot, and they have a daughter the same age as Peter's. No longer a distance concept, this surviving mother and daughter represent the everyday people we all know. It really drove home on a personal level the need to support courageous families like the Yaggys.

The inspiration for each organization to host a golf benefit tournament varies. It's extremely personal for the Staff Sgt. Tyler Pickett Memorial Tournament as they honor the life of Tyler and the 18 soldiers who perished with him in a 2008 IED attack in Iraq. The tournament raises \$5,000, which is enough to ensure that our survivors receive handwritten cards on their loved one's anniversary.

Still other organizations, such as Riunite and Putting for Patriots/Pirate Cove Miniature Golf, host campaigns tied to multiple locations or sales revenue. Not only are they able to financially support TAPS, but they bring critical awareness to the courageous survivors who find hope and healing through TAPS. Regardless of the amount of funds raised per event, these donors and partners provide critical support that allows TAPS to remain the front-line resource for those grieving a military loss.

If you are interested in starting a golf tournament or other event in your area to benefit TAPS, please contact [development@taps.org](mailto:development@taps.org) for more information.

For the players and employees who support the tournament, it's not just a cause anymore. Bonnie Carroll and other TAPS survivors have embraced EOIR into the TAPS family at the golf outing and other events throughout the year.



**BY BEVIN LANDRUM**  
TAPS Magazine Editor  
Surviving daughter of  
Army Capt. Don Rutland

*Bevin writes to honor all those who served and to keep the memories of our heroes alive in the pages of TAPS publications.*

# Colorado Celebrity Classic Benefits TAPS



In the past 11 years, under the direction of founders Bo and Lynne Cottrell, the Colorado Celebrity Classic has netted more than \$3.5 million for TAPS. This year's contribution to TAPS is over \$300,000. Proceeds from the Colorado Celebrity Classic events help sponsor vital TAPS programs, events and healing support for families like that of Sgt. Nick Pansini. Nick served five tours as a Marine, two in Iraq. When his sisters, Angel and Shannon, and dad, Joe, told the story of Nick's 2010 suicide at our banquet, the reason for supporting TAPS became clear: We care!

These generous contributions are made possible by numerous individuals and companies. More than sixty volunteers cover duties that include organizing and running the silent auction, tracking registrations and donations, escorting celebrities, recording photos and videos, manning the bars, working the golf tournament, stocking the gift bags, decorating the stage and tables, valet parking, and setting and cleaning up for the events.

The Colorado Celebrity Classic (CCC) attracts some of Colorado's most generous sponsors, such as Jake Jabs and American Furniture Warehouse, the El Pomar Foundation, Steve & Marla Grove, Pete & Marilyn Coors, Wiz Bang Solutions, Gill Photography, the Villager Publishing Company, Greiner Electric and Charles Schwab.

The CCC includes the Songwriters Show featuring award-winning songwriters from Nashville; the Saluting Our Fallen Heroes Dinner Concert with a live and silent auction and entertainment by Tony David & Wildefire and songstress Suzy Bogguss, plus a celebrity golf tournament played at the Eisenhower Golf Club at the USAF Academy.

Lynn & Tony Krekener and Burt & Andria Lewis were the lucky bidders of house concerts with Nashville songwriters. Special thanks to directors Lynne & Bo Cottrell, 60+ volunteers, and our generous donors!

**These generous contributions are made possible by numerous individuals and companies.**



# Sharing Your Story

## Finding Healing Through the Media

When three Marines came to my door the morning of Dec. 14, 2011, I had never felt so alone even though I was immediately surrounded by people. Then came the phone calls and inquiries for interviews from journalists. It was jarring. I wanted to hide away somewhere, but the world wanted to watch me grieve.

A journalist by trade, I was used to questions — from the other side of the notepad. I was good at asking questions of others, but I had never quite mastered the art of giving an interview myself. When Sam died, the task became even more difficult. I knew I wanted to share my brother — to keep his memory alive and make sure he'd never be forgotten. But for someone who made a living with her words, I couldn't quite find mine.

Through time and experience, I learned to share both Sam's story and my own. Here are some tips that I learned from my own experience to help as you share your loved one's story with the media.

### Finding Your Voice

For so many survivors, especially in the early days of grief, finding your voice can be difficult. Personally, I couldn't even say my brother's name before coming to TAPS and being around others who understood. To just say, "My brother was Maj. Sam Griffith, and he was killed in action," to a room of TAPS siblings at the National Military Survivor Seminar was so gut-wrenching that it nearly made me physically ill. And I didn't feel that as a sibling my grief was as important as that of my other family members. So, I let others do the talking in news interviews. That was perfectly OK. Instead, I facilitated interviews and circled back with journalists to make sure they had all they needed for a good story.

I realized interviews didn't have to be about my loss. Instead, I could use them as an opportunity to talk about Sam's life, how amazing he was and how, even in his death, he has a profound impact on all of the lives he touched. When you find your voice, wherever that is on your journey, know that it's OK to share the story of your loved one.

### It's Normal to Be Emotional

During my time as a reporter and editor, I got comfortable around people crying. But when we do interviews as survivors, it's common to apologize for crying or worry about how the person doing the interview is going to react. Sometimes, when we tell someone our story, he or she starts to cry and we end up consoling that person instead of the other way around. Know it's normal to cry during an interview. If the journalist gets uncomfortable, that's a problem with them, not you. Emotions are normal and part of the grieving process.

As long as you aren't crying so hard that it hinders you from sharing your story, it's all right to keep going. And whether you cry or laugh or show some frustration because your loved one is no longer here, know that your emotions are natural and authentic. No apologies required.

### How And What to Share

Journalists don't mean to be heartless, even though it can sometimes seem that way. They're looking for a hook — how they can tell a story in a way it's never been told before or with the most news value. They might ask for graphic details about the death or the way your loved one's body looked. You don't have to answer. For the general population, graphic details like that can be too much.

You can balance the details you give about your loved one's death with stories about how that person lived. Sharing a story about your loved one's humor — his favorite prank to play or her best joke that made everyone laugh — is just as, if not more, important as their manner of death. I once told a journalist about embroidering my brother's underwear with flowers and "Oh la la!" in pastel thread and how he kept it that way because it made him laugh every time he saw them. That was what people remembered when they told me they had seen the story.

### You Don't Have to Get Political

In this political season or in anything concerning politics, it seems like politicians are everywhere we turn. And surviving military families have been in the news a lot. If you feel it's important to share that you are heading to the polls this November in direct relation to your loved one's life and/or death, you can do that. Please note that TAPS does not endorse any one party or candidate.

But you also don't have to answer questions about your political beliefs. Your loved one doesn't have to be a platform to sound off about why you'd pick one candidate over the other. You have the right to tell a reporter to move on with the interview.





### You Can Stop An Interview Anytime

I've been very fortunate to share Sam's life with some amazing journalists from the *Raleigh News and Observer* in North Carolina to KTUU-TV in Alaska. But not everyone has that experience. Maybe a journalist has pressed you for details you didn't want to share about your loved one's death. Or a photographer got too close during a personal and intimate moment when you were mourning.

That's one of the reasons why TAPS offers tips to journalists on how to cover traumatic loss and grief. You can always point a reporter to [www.taps.org/media](http://www.taps.org/media) as a resource.

You can also tell a reporter you aren't comfortable answering certain questions. If he or she continues down that path, it's OK to stop the interview. Remember, you are doing the journalist a favor by offering your story, not the other way around.

### Follow Up With More Details

After the interview, media outlets may ask for photos to be sent via email. That should

be done as soon as possible. Having your favorite three to five photos of your loved one saved on a flash drive or in a folder on the desktop of your computer can help expedite that process.

If you realize later that you made a mistake in something you said or you want to clarify details, you also can follow up in an email or phone call to a journalist. In one of the interviews my parents did, I double-checked with the journalist to make sure he had the number of my brother's deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan correct in his notes. Hearing details of Sam's service incorrectly reported could have been frustrating for my family, so I followed up.

### TAPS Is Here to Help

If you ever feel like you need support with an interview, you can call on TAPS for help. Whether you've been asked to do an interview, you're not sure you can handle it alone or you've found your voice and need some help finding the right news outlet to share it, you can find the help you need through TAPS. Email [media@taps.org](mailto:media@taps.org) or call 800-959-TAPS (8277) with your

questions. TAPS also has toolkits available with a press release template to help you share your story, tips on writing a letter to the editor or doing an interview and talking points about TAPS to help others learn more on how they can get involved.

Sharing the story of your loved one's life and legacy can be a truly healing experience. And TAPS is here to make sure you aren't alone.



**BY KELLY GRIFFITH**  
**TAPS Media Relations Manager**  
 Surviving sister of  
**Marine Corps Maj. Samuel Griffith**  
*Kelly's background in journalism and the profound impact of Sam's life and service enable her to share the compassion and care of TAPS through writing.*

# Navigating Nationals: How a Rookie Volunteer Made A Lasting Impact

By Paige Williams

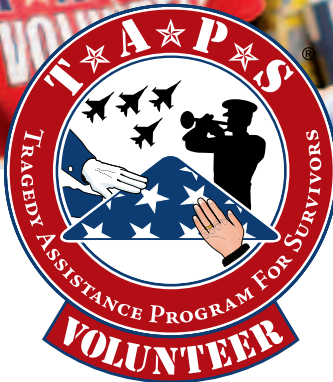
*Event support means more than an extra pair of hands.*

To a newer TAPS staff member, the National Military Survivor Seminar can be intimidating. It's a complex, fast-paced, weeklong family reunion, and I just joined the family. Beholding this mammoth of an undertaking for the first time was daunting. But I was inspired by Brandi Burke, a first-time TAPS volunteer who quite literally rolled up the sleeves of her American flag-inspired shirt on day one and went above and beyond for our families.

Brandi showed up early, stayed late, and handled everything sent her way. But what struck me most about Brandi was not the work that she did but her attitude throughout the weekend. Brandi emanated an unfailing graciousness and reverence for TAPS families that was contagious for volunteers and staff alike. Her service over a few short days resonated with me because it was driven by the desire to give back to her community in any way she could.

Brandi became the Swiss Army knife of volunteering over the course of the weekend. She started with folding and organizing hundreds of shirts for the Good Grief Camp children and mentors. She then helped post signage, and she assisted with opening ceremonies and handing out fliers. Finally, after directing families to their events, she helped with a variety of administrative needs. Throughout all of these constantly changing assignments, she was responsive, flexible and accountable.

This support goes beyond the tasks she completed. Even after a few short hours of working with her, staff knew that they could lean on her. Her reliability provided much-needed peace of mind to the staff she helped. By taking on these responsibilities



*Thank you,  
Brandi Burke!*

and being accessible and accountable, she eased potential stress and allowed staff to provide the comfort and care that TAPS families travel to the Seminar to receive.

Beyond the tasks completed and support provided to staff, Brandi contributed a positive attitude that benefitted all around her. In a notable moment in her time manning the Help Desk, Brandi and staff were

able to comfort a surviving mother checking her family into their first TAPS Seminar. Brandi reflected that this was one of the most significant aspects of her volunteer work with TAPS; she was doing exactly what she came out to accomplish, caring for families who have sacrificed for our country. She said she "could not think of a better way to spend Memorial Day weekend."

Brandi's unrelenting positivity and reverence for our families was inspiring to see and culminated in a conversation I had with her on her last day at the event. We had just loaded cases of water onto buses

taking families to Arlington National Cemetery. It was uncomfortably hot and we were tired from heavy lifting, but as we watched the buses pull away, Brandi thanked me. It struck me as odd, considering she was giving her time to TAPS. Then she told me that she hopes she never needs the services TAPS provides but is comforted to know there is a place she could go for care and comfort if she does. She told me she wants to be a part of supporting those who do need TAPS. She said, "As a military spouse, I felt a need to honor my husband's service, and volunteering is the best way I know how to give back."

Any gratitude that TAPS expressed for her dedication and flexibility was returned tenfold when she saw the Good Grief Camp mentors laughing and playing with children of fallen heroes. All the praise we could give her pales in comparison to being able to comfort a mother new to the Seminar. Brandi was the embodiment of a TAPS volunteer, dedicating selfless service to our survivors throughout the National Seminar.



# BOTH SIDES NOW

## A TRUE STORY OF LOVE, LOSS AND BOLD LIVING

By Nancy Sharp • Reviewed by Bevin Landrum, MA

Watching our loved one pass away after a long illness is a grueling nightmare that ushers in change in an expected, but still devastating manner. Many TAPS families have endured just this type of heartbreak. In the pages of Nancy Sharp's book, "Both Sides Now," they will find a blend of love, humor and reminiscence that begins to unravel the jumbled life we all face on the other side of loss.

As a young mother, Sharp faced a crisis out of the natural order. Her healthy husband, father of their two small children, was dying of cancer. She passionately writes about the happy kismet of their early relationship and deals candidly with the hard days during his treatment and the realization that he was not going to get better. The end would come.

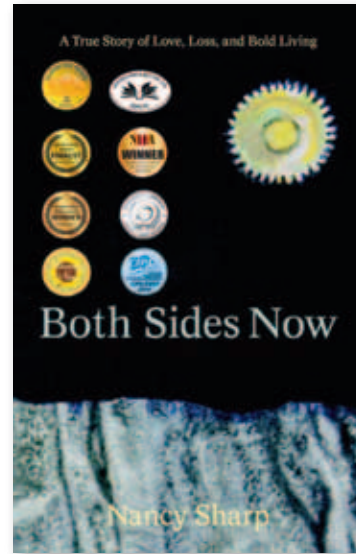
Her halting thoughts during the months after Brett passed away were surprisingly easy to read. Reassuring her children when her own heart was broken. Finding organization and purpose in her career when everything felt in shambles. A journey back to faith on her own terms. The need for people who understand grief and tragedy. Those who know, "there will never be an acceptable answer to the question of why it happened." All themes which run strong in our TAPS family and are relatable for those seeking a shared identity amid the strange otherness in which we now live.

Throughout the first part of the book, Sharp struggles with the very different way

she and her husband handle his illness, but eventually grasps that there is no right or wrong way, only the way that is enough for you to get through the experience. She held tightly to this knowledge two years after Brett's death when she made the bold step to leave her East Coast roots and strike off for the healing mountains of Colorado. Her decision to find something more in life than only being a young widow was anchored in her understanding of hope as a life source. Eventually, Sharp finds love and remarriage in 2008 with a widower. Together, their blended family is a testament to the seasons of life.

The chapters and thoughts are short. The author admits she couldn't focus or write long because of her grief, and this makes it easy to read for someone also grieving. She gives the reader just enough words to stimulate our thoughts and touch our hearts without overwhelming us. This is an easy book to put down and come back to later without losing the narrative thread.

The book reads differently over time, so give yourself the space to reread it or to work through parts at different stages in



your grief. It's definitely a book to keep around for a while. I first read it after my father passed away from a long struggle with Parkinson's. I wanted so desperately to find some key to making the expected nature of his death and his release from pain be enough to soothe my grieving heart. Her experience quickly made me realize that even expected death cannot reconcile the two sides of our lives: with our loved one and without them. Instead, we question our own

mortality, fear the loss of others close to us and must come to understand that life is worth living and there is hope in our tomorrow.

Reading it for a second time, I'm struck with how the author captures the essence of bravery that sustained her husband through his illness. We often feel fragile in our grief, but any survivor can find inspiration and courage in the pages of this book knowing that our loved ones are with us in spirit all the time.

Gone, but not forgotten. Loved just as much on this side as on the other side of life.

Both sides now.

*Her decision to find something more in life than only being a young widow was anchored in her understanding of hope as a life source.*

# NEW YORK LIFE FOUNDATION

It was a typical workday for Marine Michael Walton, the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar command sergeant major, until he received an email forwarded to him by Bonnie Carroll. He was intrigued by the call for mentors and especially by the TAPS mission.

In his position, he was unsure if he could personally support the Southern California Good Grief Campout, but he called TAPS to see how he could support recruitment efforts. Still sitting on the fence about personal involvement, he learned that New York Life was sponsoring the Campout in July in honor of Maj. Taj Sareen. He did not hesitate. Walton answered the call and registered to be a TAPS Good Grief Camp Mentor right away because now it was personal. He knew the major; he was the command sergeant major for Maj. Sareen's unit when he died.

Maj. Sareen was a pilot with the Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232 from Marine Corps Air Station Miramar when he died in Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom. Upon realizing that his malfunctioning aircraft was headed for a populated area, he stayed with his aircraft and navigated it to a less-populated area before his aircraft crashed. His heroic act ultimately cost him his life, but in exchange, he saved the lives of many others. His father, Kulbhusan Sareen, retired from New York Life. To honor

his son's heroic service, New York Life is sponsoring the Southern California Good Grief Campout for three years.

During this year's Campout, Command Sgt. Maj. Walton served as a mentor to Daniel Sustaita, helping Daniel honor and remember his brother as they climbed rock walls, hiked, zip lined, swam and joined in other traditional camp activities. Daniel came from Texas to attend the Campout near Miramar, the last duty station where his brother served.

For Daniel, attending the Campout provided him a space to remember his brother and connect with others who understand what it is like to lose a loved one who died in the military. For the command sergeant major, he too found healing and a way to honor the life of Maj. Sareen.

"Being a part of the experience was reward enough," Command Sgt. Maj. Walton said. "I was blessed to be a part of the TAPS team and will look for other opportunities in the future. Thank you for all that you do for the children."

In addition to financial sponsorship, Southern California New York Life employees volunteered throughout the campout. Volunteers could be found handing out snacks, making sure kids were hydrated, leading craft activities, passing out goody

bags and helping campers off the zip line after an exhilarating ride.

Since May 2012, New York Life has donated \$1.3 million to TAPS for the National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp and the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. The organization also has provided numerous volunteers for the Good Grief Camp Zone during event registrations.

This March, New York Life helped create a special experience for several TAPS kids to help kick off the ACC Men's Basketball Tournament with an event at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Arlington, Virginia. The ACC team mascots danced and took part in basketball drills with the children. New York Life's Volunteers for Good jumped in, playing basketball and enjoying an ice cream social to cap off the afternoon.

New York Life gives back through the New York Life Foundation, serving in the communities where their employees live and work. The foundation was created in 1979 and has provided more than \$140 million in charitable contributions to national and local nonprofits such as TAPS. The foundation focuses on serving bereaved children and helping youth deal with the loss of a parent, caregiver or sibling.



# TAPS Partners Make the Difference

TAPS works with sponsors and partners who support the TAPS mission with volunteers, financial support and in-kind donations.



**★ AMERICAN LEGION:** The American Legion Auxiliary Unit 270 (Angels of Mercy) out of Vienna, Virginia, contributed \$75,000 to support our Good Grief Camps around the country.

**★ PRUDENTIAL FINANCIAL, INC.:** Prudential Financial, Inc. continues to support the TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline to ensure 24/7 access to our network of trained professionals.

**★ H-E-B:** H-E-B provided volunteers, financial support and many smiles for TAPS families who attended the Fort Hood Survivor Regional Seminar and Good Grief Camp in July.

**★ GIANT FOOD:** Giant Food has invested \$100,000 in the Inner Warrior health and wellness program launched this year.

**★ USO:** The USO partnered with TAPS to provide 1,400 Resource Kits containing vital information to new survivors.

**★ UBER:** In addition to donating \$50,000 to TAPS, Uber launched a yearlong campaign to offer free rides to TAPS families and battle buddies to visit Arlington National Cemetery.

**★ HOME DEPOT:** Volunteers from Home Depot District 87 hosted workshops spanning two days for 200 survivors at the Atlanta Regional Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp in August.

**★ COCA-COLA:** Nearly 75 volunteers from Coca-Cola welcomed our families with smiles and gifts at the Atlanta Regional Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp in August.

**THANK YOU TAPS PARTNERS!**

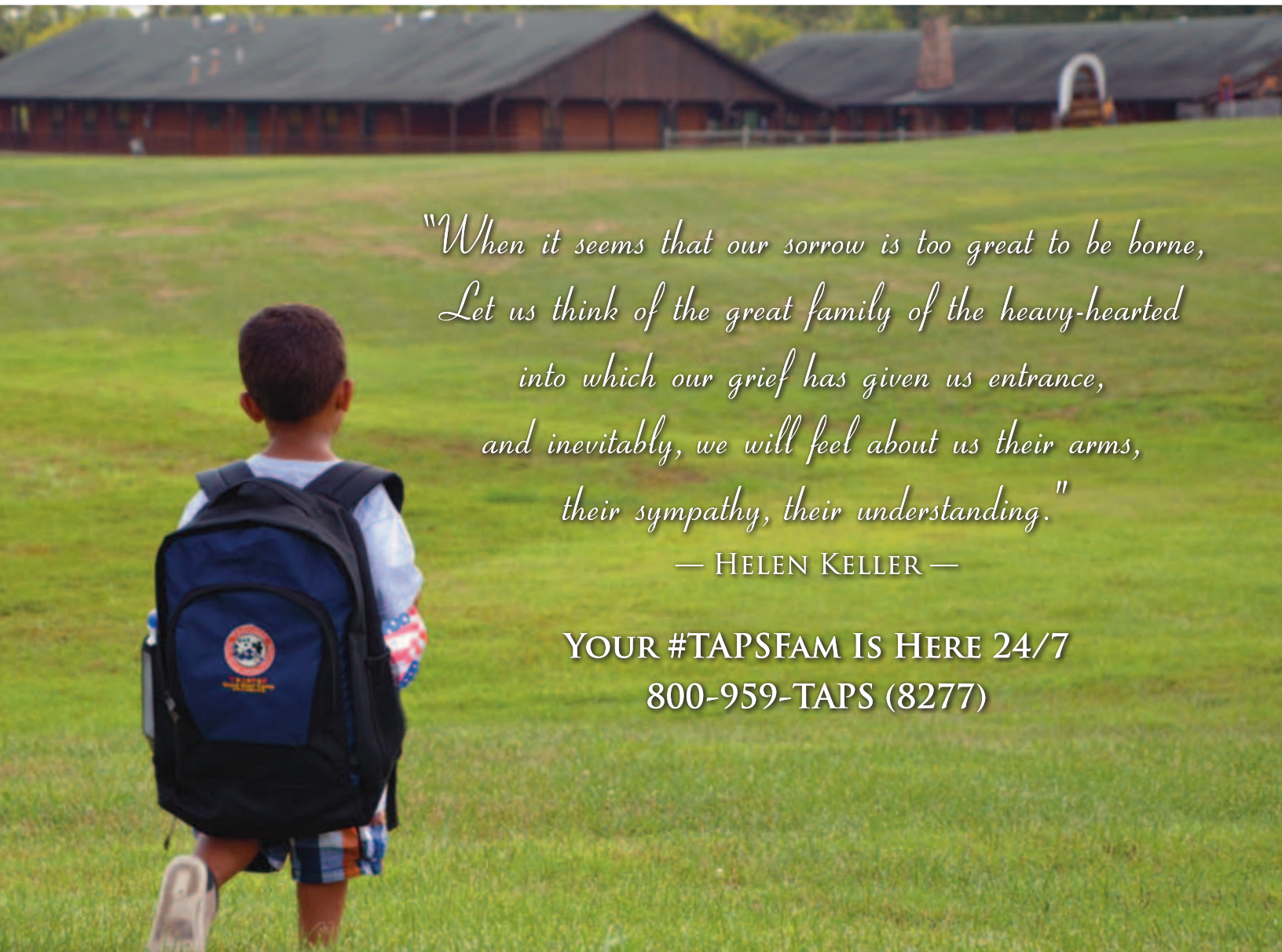


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*"When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne,  
Let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted  
into which our grief has given us entrance,  
and inevitably, we will feel about us their arms,  
their sympathy, their understanding."*

— HELEN KELLER —

**YOUR #TAPSFAM IS HERE 24/7  
800-959-TAPS (8277)**