

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served & Died

T★A★P★S[®]

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MAGAZINE



LEAN into GRIEF

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An Identity
Redefined

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Compassion for All

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Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT, immersed herself in a creative collage process a year after her 17-year-old daughter Kristin ended her own life. It became the foundation for her book, *Artful Grief: A Diary of Healing*. She leads national and local art therapy workshops for survivors of loss.

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Kelly resides in Illinois. She is the TAPS Magazine Editor and Manager of Internal Communications and the surviving sister of Marine Corps Maj. Samuel Griffith.

On the Cover

Lean into grief and find healing with your TAPS family. Find out how at www.taps.org.

LETTER FROM

Bonnie Carroll



Welcome

Welcome to our quarterly *TAPS Magazine*, our loving message of hope and healing to you.

TAPS is a family built on love, made up of all of us who have come together from across the country and around the world through shared experience. We are here for each other, with comfort, care and resources.

We hope you will find help, hope and healing within the pages of this issue of our *TAPS Magazine*. There is fellowship with others who understand. There is healing in honoring your loved one and finding your new self. Battlefield promises can be kept. You can have compassion for yourself. See your own self in the stories

of others. And find hope for the way forward.

TAPS provides so many services and programs for you, and we want you to take advantage of them all. We have wonderful online communities, whether it's our Facebook groups (@TAPSOrg) or our chats (taps.org/chat) or the TAPS Saturday Morning Message that comes by email. There are local care groups meeting all across the country, and we are always setting up one-day special events for survivors. If there isn't something near you and you'd like to have a get together, let us know and we'll work to make it happen.

TAPS Casework is another free service that can provide you with one place for all your needs and questions, whether it's about military benefits, emergency financial support, education entitlements for surviving children, healthcare questions or access to reports and investigations. We are here for you, and eager to help.

You also have the 24/7 Helpline available to you anytime day or night. And remember TAPS can connect you to free and unlimited grief counseling in addition to your TAPS Peer Mentor. Let us know if you'd like us to make an appointment for you right there in your local community with a professional who can support you at no cost.

There is so much TAPS offers at no cost to you, right where you are. But the most important thing about TAPS is that we are a family. We are together because someone we love lived an extraordinary life of selfless service, and we love them and we honor them.

Hope to hear from you soon,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Bonnie Carroll".

TAPS President and Founder



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TAPS is here

24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK

- ★ The National Military Survivor Helpline
 - ★ National Peer Support Network
 - ★ Quarterly *TAPS Magazine*
- ★ Connections to Local Grief Support
 - ★ Casework Assistance
 - ★ Education Support Services
 - ★ TAPS Online Community
 - ★ Grief Education Materials
- ★ Survivor Seminars and Retreats
- ★ Good Grief Camps for Children

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Letters TO TAPS



Valuing Small Things

I have learned to appreciate and value a timely note, a kind word or even a smile. A quote that was used at my son's funeral, "Don't strive to be successful, but rather to be of value," from Albert Einstein strikes me. Some of the simplest things in life can be the most valuable. How can you put a price tag on a smile or a hug? I'm reminded of hugs from my son; man hugs are good, but when you get a hug from a Marine you know you've been hugged. Thanks for all you do for surviving parents and families.

Brent McMillan, South Carolina
Surviving father of
Staff Sgt. Nathaniel McMillan

Gaining a New Family

In the past few months, due to Michael's death, I have lost relationships with family members and friends. I had no idea that death was such a wakeup call to reality. On the other hand, I have gained friendships that have been absolutely amazing and supportive. I have gained a new family through TAPS. Whenever I contact TAPS, for whatever reason, I receive a quick response that is delivered with the utmost kindness, compassion and empathy. I can't even begin to tell you how much I appreciate that. Please know how grateful I am for your support. Thank you and all the people at TAPS for making me feel visible.

Joan Eaves, Pennsylvania
Surviving mother of
Sgt. 1st Class Michael Tucker

Finding Inspiration in Others

I can't thank you enough for reaching out, and being there for me. My entire TAPS family, you all have been amazingly kind and caring. I couldn't walk this journey without all of your love and support.

Carol Shapiro, California
Surviving aunt of
Spc. Rudy Acosta

To my TAPS family members who are further along in the grief journey, you are such an inspiration of hope to me. I feel if you can make it, so can I.

Ramona Somaru, Michigan
Surviving mother of
Lance Cpl. Michael Somaru

Healing Through Running

I am grateful for this amazing opportunity to raise money and run at the Disneyland Half Marathon weekend. Our family has made this a tradition since the devastating loss of my nephew Rudy A. Acosta on March 19, 2011. TAPS has made an incredible impact on our family, helping us to get through a very difficult time after this loss. This run has brought our family together for a weekend after months of training. We share our memories, thoughts and our heartfelt gratitude for those who have lost their lives and served in our military. We have grown so much. Thank you TAPS for all your hard work and time.

Connecting with Others

TAPS has been there from day one. From the beginning, I was given some of the best coping skills. From retreats to an overnight cruise on the USS John Stennis to teams4taps recognitions with the LA Rams and Dodgers to regular emails to the *TAPS Magazine*, TAPS has simply offered the opportunity to be around other families who get it and develop friendships. The opportunity to serve as a mentor to a newer surviving dad is as therapeutic for me as it is for him. TAPS has helped me cope and taught me how to handle the unthinkable. Thank you TAPS for all you do and for always being there, especially when the need is the greatest.

John Kelsall, California
Surviving father of
Lt. Cmdr. Jonas Kelsall

Please email your Letter to
TAPS to editor@taps.org.

THE CHOICE to Grieve

By Laura Morrison
Stepmother of
Cpl. Keith Essary

We have lots of choices in life. We choose what job to have, where to live, who we want to be. Every day we make choices both big and small; the choices are all around us. But when it comes to grief, it can feel like there is no choice.

Grief is thrust upon us, and I don't think anyone takes it well. I know my family didn't. I'll never forget the phone call from Keith's dad. "The DoD just left my house," he said a few times before I told him to explain. "Laura, Keith was killed. He isn't coming home." Grief totally consumed my children and me after my stepson, Army Cpl. Keith Essary, was killed on Jan. 8, 2009.

WHEN IT COMES
TO GRIEF, IT CAN
FEEL LIKE THERE
IS NO CHOICE.

My daughter Brooke, a teenager at the time, tried very hard to hide her feelings. She felt she had to keep it together because everyone around her was falling apart. My then 10-year-old son Randy was angry, frequently arguing and back talking. I wanted to help them, but I wasn't sure how. I could barely help myself. Our family was going through this grief journey together, but at the same time, very much alone.

Nearly six months after Keith's death, we learned about TAPS. Not quite sure what to expect, I talked Randy into attending a Good Grief Campout at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I convinced him it would be like Boy Scouts. Brooke and I made plans to stay at a hotel nearby for the weekend so we would be right there if Randy decided to leave.



When we dropped him off, we were met by the most amazing group of people. Brooke even made the spur-of-the-moment choice to stay for the weekend. When I left my children to go to the hotel, I felt some hope. Somehow, I believed my children would find some peace and some healing. I was so happy when I picked them up and realized they had. That weekend, they were surrounded by others their age who knew exactly what military loss feels like.

We attended another TAPS event in February 2011 at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. My former mother-in-law, whom I still consider close family, was stationed there as an active duty Army National Guard nurse, and the family of the soldier who was killed in action with Keith lived just a few minutes away. I made friends at that seminar, and I'm still connected to them to this day. To be with people who totally understood the things that I was feeling, even when I couldn't communicate them, was such a relief.

But the best part has been Randy's experience. He first connected with his military mentor and other soldiers at the Good Grief Camp. And that mentor changed Randy's life. The two laughed and played and talked all weekend long. Randy, Brooke and I joined the soldiers for Saturday evening bowling that weekend. They treated Randy like he was just one of the guys. Since Keith was 10 years older than him, it was like watching my sons spend time together. Many years later, we still talk about that night.

The relationship didn't end there. Randy and his mentor exchanged phone numbers. I became Facebook friends with the mentor's wife. And in the last six years, we've had countless phone conversations, texts and Facebook messages. We've sent Randy's mentor care packages and letters when he was stationed overseas. His mentor gave advice and was a listening ear so many times when Randy needed a big brother. He even calls Randy on his birthday every year. It means so much to us, and my son truly loves him.

As each grandchild has graduated from high school, my mother-in-law has taken them on a trip anywhere in the world they want to go with her. She and Keith had gone to France and England. Brooke chose a coastal tour of Ireland. Randy was able to take his trip this past February. His choice

was to visit his mentor and family at their home. Being back with his newfound big brother, Randy went indoor skydiving and zip lining. They had the best time.

On that bitter cold day in January 2009 as I stood on the tarmac of our local airport and watched Keith's flag-draped coffin come home, no one would have been able to convince me that any good could come out of our tragedy or that I had a choice in my grief. After eight years, I can look back and see the difference that TAPS has made in our lives. Without TAPS, and all of our fellow survivor friends and the mentors who have touched our lives, we would no doubt be wishing to have a place to belong.

And without his mentor, I know Randy's life would not be the same.

That first camp my children attended was a choice. It was my choice to turn to TAPS for help, my son's choice to be open to the idea, my daughter's choice to stay even though she hadn't planned on it. We all made choices that weekend. We were exhausted, and we each made a choice to make a change.

You have the same opportunity to make a choice. Although TAPS didn't make our grief go away, it continues to help us along in this journey. It's a journey I don't think will ever end, but I'm glad I don't have to go alone. And I'm glad I made the choice to grieve. *

WE WERE EXHAUSTED, AND WE EACH MADE A CHOICE TO MAKE A CHANGE.





BECOME A PEER MENTOR

Would you like to become a beacon of hope by using your experience to bring comfort to another? The TAPS Peer Mentor program is for you. Survivors helping survivors is a powerful connection. Together we support each other and celebrate the lives of our precious heroes, finding strength, hope and compassion with each other. Whether you're further along in your journey and ready to help others or recently bereaved and reaching for hope, the power of survivors helping other survivors has proven successful.

If you are 18 months beyond your loss, you can complete a training course and join the circle of hope by becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor. You can serve as a companion to new survivors, helping them know they are not alone. The gift of your presence will have a positive impact on others, as well as yourself.



If you would like to be a part of the vital, caring outreach of TAPS, consider becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor. Visit www.taps.org/peermentors to learn more.

New to grief and looking to connect with someone? You can find out how to request a peer mentor at www.taps.org/peermentors. The caring family of surviving military loved ones at TAPS is here for you.

By Ben Wolfe

When you think of an island, what comes to mind? Is it a large island on a big lake, or a small piece of land in the middle of a river that somehow still holds its identity? What if islands were not always looked at as physical locations? In his book, "Paddle Whispers," Doug Wood writes an island "can be a place; it can be an idea or even a hope. But for a short while, at least, it is somewhere to rest, to renew the job of being, to gather strength for the journey."

When you think of your own journey through grief, what are your islands of rest? Maybe they are moments of quiet that help you reevaluate life. Maybe they are space to hope and dream again. Maybe they are places that allow you to calm your mind and assess what's important. Regardless of what these islands look like, when we find one, it calls us to

slow down and take time to observe the landscape of our new surroundings. We can find space to appreciate the sacredness of the moment. We can take refuge on these islands and allow them to lead to new opportunities, both in our grief journey and in life.

In his book, Wood shares his experiences of taking his canoe out onto small lakes and experiencing the moments of life around him, and those moments of exploration within himself. When do you make the time for your own exploration? When do you stop on your own island, visiting the quiet places within yourself that help direct you on your journey?

In the book, "Chased By The Light," world famous photographer Jim Brandenburg documents his 90-day journey of limiting himself to only one photograph a day.

One click of the camera each day for 90 days. The book is a story of finding the right moment in time. Of not always finding "exactly what we want," but of the search for something special. Something different. Something that is meaningful to others and us. Brandenburg writes, "I wanted to wander the forest, to see what was over the next rise, to follow animal tracks in the snow as I had done so happily as a boy. Each photograph would be a true original, like a painting."

Our lives are made up of moments upon moments. How do we capture these moments in our lives? How do we explore who we are and where we are going? What are your ideas, your hopes, your dreams? What are your islands, and how can they help you rest during the storms or the calm times in your life? Travel safe. Travel light. But take time to explore. *

Islands OF REST



Following *in* Dad's *Footsteps*

By Kelly McHugh-Stewart

Surviving daughter of Col. John McHugh

The last mile was the most painful, physically and mentally.

I tried to keep from dwelling too much on my dad for the first 24 miles of the race in fear I'd break down too early and lose the energy I needed to finish my first marathon. But once my blistered body hit the 25-mile marker, I let the tears and the

memories flow. My salty tears mixed with my sweat and were quickly washed away in the steady downpour of rain that, like the tired runners surrounding me, never gave up on that cool May morning.

My dad, Army Col. John McHugh, ran this path before me. His blistered feet and tired body pounded this same Nebraska pavement

16 years before mine had. It had been nearly six years since a suicide bomber took his life in Kabul, Afghanistan, but in running one of the same marathons that he ran, I felt I was able to finally share something with him again. For the first time since his death, I felt like I was making a memory with him.

Following his death, I used running as a way to cope with my loss and keep my emotions at bay.

During his 46 years, my dad ran three marathons: the Lincoln National Guard Marathon in Lincoln, Nebraska, the Blue Angel Marathon in Pensacola, Florida, and the München Marathon in Munich, Germany. Running was a passion that he and I shared, and I always dreamed that one day we would run 26.2 miles together. I was 18 years old when he was killed in action on May 18, 2010. We never had the chance.

I remember the first time I woke up early to go running with my father. It was during my freshman year of high school and my family was stationed at Fort Rucker, Alabama, the Home of Army Aviation. Though I had run numerous 5Ks and Fun Runs on post with him and my siblings, this run was different. When I awoke at 5 a.m., I could hear the faint humming of soldiers chanting in unison outside my window. I stumbled out of my twin-sized bed and slid on the shorts and t-shirt I had laid out the night before. If I wanted to join my dad for physical training, I had to get up early. I remember racing down the hallway in my socks to find my dad sitting on our living room floor, stretching. I laced my sneakers and sat on the floor next to him.

It was still dark when we walked out of our carport door and into the cool spring morning. The cicadas had long stopped their nightly chirping, but the birds were yet to awaken and begin theirs. The only sound was the hum of groups of soldiers as they trotted down our sleepy street in their grey t-shirts with ARMY written in big, bold reflective letters on the front. Numerous roads on Fort Rucker were

closed Monday through Friday from 5 to 7 a.m. for this post-wide fitness session, and I felt like a grown up joining these soldiers in their training. I don't remember how far my dad and I ran that morning, but I do remember how we chatted the entire run and that I never put in my headphones to listen to the new music I had added to my MP3 player the night before. That run was the first of many we'd set out on together through Fort Rucker before we moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, then to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It was at Fort Leavenworth where I'd run with my dad for the final time. But I don't remember the last run with him like I remember that first run.

Following his death, I used running as a way to cope with my loss and keep my emotions at bay. During the summer of 2010, I ran three miles every morning around Fort Leavenworth, always finishing my run at the cemetery. Jogging, biking, dog walking and loitering are not permitted on the Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery grounds, but I ignored the big, rusted sign at the cemetery's entrance every morning as I finished my daily runs at his marble white headstone. Some mornings, I'd do pushups or sit-ups on the well-kept

green grass surrounding his grave. Some mornings, I'd stretch my legs and cool down while looking out over the thousands of identical rounded headstones. Some mornings, I'd cry.

It was after one of these runs as I was lying in the grass at Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery where I came up with the idea to run the same three marathons that my dad ran, and though it took me six years after his death to muster up the courage

It was after one of these runs as I was lying in the grass at Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery where I came up with the idea to run the same three marathons that my dad ran.

to sign up and train for one of these races, nothing compared to the feeling of running and finishing the Lincoln Marathon, just like him.

When I looked into the Blue Angel Marathon, I was faced with a dilemma – it no longer exists like it did when my dad ran it in the late 1990s. The Blue Angel Marathon is now the Blue Angel Rock N' Fly Half

Marathon, and that's just not the same. While I still hope to run the Rock N' Fly Half, I decided to make a change to my three-marathon plan by substituting Pensacola for something else, for a marathon my dad dreamt of taking on but never had the chance – the TCS New York City Marathon.

Through Team TAPS, I am able to make this dream a reality. I recently moved to New York City where I'm pursuing my Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at The New School, so I have seen and felt the pride of this historic race first-hand. Having the opportunity to be a part of it because of TAPS is a dream come true. I can't wait to run through the streets of New York City this fall alongside fellow survivors as we celebrate and remember the lives of our loved ones who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

My dad's memory carried me through my first 26.2 miles in Lincoln, Nebraska, and I know it will do the same this November through New York City's five Boroughs. Then, one of these days, I'll make the trip to Munich, Germany, and complete my own trio of marathons. Just like my dad. *



HANDMADE BOOKS

I remember feeling insulted when the daffodils came into full bloom. I had the urge to dig them up and toss them aside. I lost my 17-year-old daughter Kristin to suicide, on Oct. 11, 2001, and it was my first spring without her. How dare the earth come alive again when I was indwelling and silent, still fully immersed in winter and my “dark night”? The 16th Century Spanish poet, John of the Cross, recognized the dark night as a time of spiritual crisis.

During those cold months, I turned my attention toward the pain and suffering and created one collage after another. It was a time when I grappled with the realization that my inner and outer worlds had collapsed. As an art therapist, I embraced my creative process and tried to make sense of the senseless. Plagued with intense emotions, I worked hard.

I would have stayed in my dark, quiet and contemplative state, doing what Carl Jung defined as “soul work,” but I couldn’t deny the natural awakening of the earth. I was unknowingly ready to reap the rewards of my creative labors, with what Jung called, “spirit work.” Grief expert Alan Wolfelt calls this the next step after the descent, the upward, ascending movement of the psyche. I entered a time of personal transformation where the energy of rebirth, rejuvenation, renewal and resurrection was irrefutable.

Fifteen years have passed since that first spring, and there has been healing with each turn of the seasons. Recently, I went into my garden and cut a handful of daffodils and placed them in a vase on the table in my art studio. They are one of spring’s first perennial blooms and represent life’s giving attributes as well as hope, clarity, creativity, inspiration and forgiveness.

The flowers reminded me how far I had come as I welcomed a small group of suicide survivors to my Artful Grief Studio. They came to my workshop on how to make a handmade book. They were in various places in their grief journeys, but all were willing to try something new.

Each person had a sheet of watercolor paper, a set of watercolors, brushes, water and a white crayon. I lit a candle to mark the beginning of our work together and invited each person to share an intention.

By Sharon Strouse, MA, ATR-BC, LCPAT

“I want peace.” “I want to let go.” “I am searching for forgiveness.” “I’m not sure of my intention but I’m here and I want to tell my story.”

The unfolding process

I guided them to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths before writing. This unfolding process was marked with smiles, tears and sighs. Writing in a stream of consciousness, the group didn’t stop for 15 minutes. When they finished, they looked at what they had written and shared their experiences.

“My story disappeared into the paper.” “I felt safe.” “I could not control my arm and my writing got looser and looser – I had to let go.” “I was surprised by what came out of me, and my story was layered.” “I wrote over and on top of my own words.”

Bringing color to our stories

After sharing, they began to paint with watercolors. Bold and curious, the group experimented with color intensity and the various effects of the paper’s saturation with water. I watched them add color and saw as yellow bled into a field of light purple and blue.

“Oh look, it’s like a sun, spreading across the sky. I’m reminded of my son and how bright he still shines.” “The weight of my story seemed to dissolve on the page.” “I felt the energy of what I had written rise off the paper.”

Tiny pages speak volumes

After the papers dried, we began folding them into fours, now giving them 16 pages. The last task was folding the 16 pages, like an accordion, into a tiny book that could be held in the palm of each survivor’s hand. We passed our handmade books around the circle, honoring everyone’s creative expression.

“My story was deconstructed; it folded in on itself.” “I loved the pages’ rough edges.” “Each page was different.” “My feelings were seen and not seen at the same time.” “I feel calmer than when I arrived.”

Healing does not happen by itself; it takes work. Jung said, “There is no coming to consciousness without pain. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.” Creating handmade books made the darkness conscious.

Over the years my grief has led me to meditation and a host of creative

processes, like collage, altered books, mask making and handmade books. I explored and worked with my feelings and my shattered identity through these creative experiences. Making a handmade book can be a perfect opportunity to let go and create a lasting treasure and reminder of how far you have come in your journey to find healing. ★

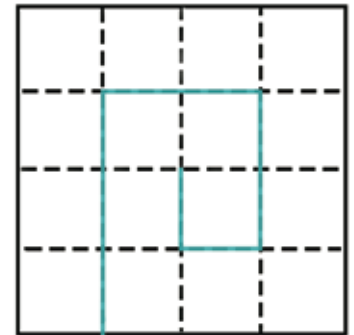
MAKE YOUR OWN HANDMADE BOOK

MATERIALS NEEDED:

A set of watercolors
Watercolor brushes – various sizes and shapes
Watercolor paper – that folds easily
A cup of clean water and paper towels
White crayon

HOW TO CREATE A HANDMADE BOOK:

- Cut or tear your watercolor paper into 11-by-10-inches.
- Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Check in with your feelings: Are you sad? Lonely? Angry? When you are ready, open your eyes.
- With the white crayon, write on the white watercolor paper. Once you begin writing, don’t lift your crayon from the paper. Let your thoughts and feeling flow in one continuous unbroken experience, until you feel finished. Your deep self will guide you. Fill the entire surface of the paper. You may find that you write on top of what you have already written. You can write on the back side of your paper or leave it blank. If you decide to write on the back side of your watercolor paper, start from the beginning. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. You may be surprised by the result.
- Take time to look at what you have created before you begin to paint. Consider journaling about the process and your feelings.
- Dip your brush in the water and then into one of the colors. You can paint directly onto the dry paper, or paper that you have saturated with water. This will allow the colors to run, forming interesting patterns.
- After the paper dries, fold the paper into equal quarters, along the top and on the sides, giving you 16 sections. Press hard along the fold lines. Accuracy is important, so take your time.
- Cut or tear the paper in a basic “snail shape” (see diagram above).
- Folding the paper, back and forth, form an accordion, beginning with the first page, until you have a small 16-page handmade book.
- Cut a piece of ribbon, approximately 32 inches. Wrap the ribbon around the tiny book several times to secure it and keep it private.
- Take the time to reflect on your process and its meaning. Place your handmade book in a place of reverence and continue to dialogue with it. Enjoy.



MAKING Memories AT MEALTIMES

TAPS was born around a kitchen table, when families grieving a military tragedy came together to support each other and find comfort in knowing they weren't alone. It was over shared meals and cups of tea that they were able to find a way forward, and still today we find that food is a wonderful way to come together, nourishing our bodies while we feed our souls.

We *share* memories around the table. Our loved ones' sense of humor, a joke told across the dinner table that left everyone laughing. Sitting for hours pushing peas around with a spoon until they finally relented to take a single "no-thank-you bite." The game as Cheerios were strewn around a highchair while the dog rushed in to fill his duty as the resident vacuum cleaner. Movie night with the greasiest pizza and the largest bowl of popcorn that could be found. Saturday mornings filled with making chocolate chip pancakes with extra chocolate sauce to go with bacon and eggs. Lunches packed with notes of love. Mashed potatoes at Thanksgiving dinner when someone took almost the entire dish in one scoop. Engagements marked with a special dessert. Birthday cakes with more frosting than cake.

We *make* memories around the table. At TAPS events, we find our community when we sit across from a newfound friend who understands our grief. We learn that we are not alone. During potluck meals at TAPS Care Groups, widows connect and forge bonds that last a lifetime. Standing in the buffet line at a TAPS Seminar, parents share similar stories of children who had a passion for their mission. While eating pizza after the Marine Corps Marathon in the Team TAPS tent, surviving siblings laugh about pranks pulled and punishments dodged by blaming their brothers and sisters. Surviving children talk to their military mentors at camp about their loved ones' favorite foods. We find connection with others while we sit with a cup of coffee and share in the TAPS Online Community. We relax in our favorite chair, sipping tea and finding comfort in the *TAPS Magazine* or a book from the TAPS book shelf.

Through Recipes of Remembrance, we will take the opportunity to honor our loved ones' lives of selfless service and their love of family, friends and food. In each issue, we'll share a personal story, but we also hope you'll see your family's story of love here. It is our hope that you will share your loved one's favorite foods with us, and also make new memories through trying the favorites of your TAPS family's loved ones. We're a family, and we are sitting around America's kitchen table.

Happy cooking. And happy memory making.

Submit your story and recipe by email at
editor@taps.org.

Hungry *for* a Challenge

Submitted by the
Foundling family in honor of
Army Pfc. Adam Foundling

A natural born chef, Adam loved to make Beef Wellington for us as a family. He always liked to challenge himself with recipes and was building a cookbook of his favorite ones. One weekend, he announced he was going to make a better Beef Wellington than British celebrity chef Gordon Ramsey and bought all ingredients. It was the first time he had ever made the dish. Adam swapped out the traditional liver pâté used in Beef Wellington for a mushroom seasoning. When we sat down to dinner, we had to admit the meal was absolutely incredible, and he had done himself proud.



Beef Wellington

PREP TIME: 20 MINUTES | COOK TIME: 55 MINUTES

Ingredients

- 2 packets frozen puff pastry
- 5-lb. fillet of beef
- 4 Tbsp. butter
- ½ lb. mushrooms
- ¼ cup onion
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 egg white
- Salt and pepper

Method

- Preheat the oven to 425°F. Rub the fillet of beef with 2 Tbsp. butter. Roast on a rack for 25 minutes or until at 120°F (very rare). Let meat cool to room temperature.
- Roll puff pastry into a rectangle, 1 ½ inch larger in width than beef fillet. Prepare mushroom seasoning by cooking with onions in 2 Tbsp. butter and olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Let cool.
- Spread cooked mushroom seasoning on puff pastry rectangle. Center beef fillet on pastry. Roll remaining puff pastry over fillet and secure edges with egg white, pinched edges together. Brush top with remaining egg white.
- Cook at 425°F on greased baking sheet for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 375°F for 20 minutes until golden crust. Let cool for 15 minutes.
- Serve with roasted potatoes, glazed carrots and green beans.

REAL MEN

DO CRY

By Jon W. Ganues

Surviving father of Airman 1st Class Jon Wesley Ganues, Jr.

Always the alpha male, I was used to denying myself any show of weakness. I had to show strength, control and the ability to fix anything with a roll of duct tape. But I learned duct tape can't fix some things – like a broken heart or family relationships when there are differences in grief expression.

I lost my son, Airman 1st Class Jon Wesley Ganues, Jr., on June 2, 2009, to suicide, five days before his squadron deployed to Iraq. He was a security policeman stationed at Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia. Wesley's death was not PTS related, but a result of a domestic dispute with his wife. His death came as a shock. I got the phone call while I was at work. I was stunned, numb and sick all at the same time.

My close friend at work, who was and is my brother in Christ, comforted me and prayed for me while I tried to process the news. I can remember calling Wesley's cell phone over and over, praying he would answer, and hanging on each word as I listened to him tell me to leave a message.

My heart will forever have a tear in it from losing him that day.

Coupled with my grief, the dark circumstances of Wesley's death set me on a path of self-inflicted shame. I operated in a fog for several months and dreaded having to answer questions of how he died. It was the look people gave me that I hated most – that "How do I get out of this?" look of total discomfort. I've since learned how to put others at ease as I offer my story to them.

After attending a support group at Fort Lee, Virginia, and getting connected to TAPS, I started moving forward in my grief. My wife Maria and I attended our first TAPS National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar in 2010 with great apprehension. Knowing neither what to expect nor anyone there made us cautious of opening up to anyone the first day. However, as the weekend went on, we realized we were in the right place with the right people, who made us feel like family. Finally, we had found a safe place to cry, listen, talk, think and just breathe.

In August 2014, I found myself at a Montana Men's Retreat in Chico Hot Springs, Montana. My primary purpose for attending, I wanted to move past my lingering feeling that Wesley didn't measure up to those who lost their lives on the battlefield. I shared this the first night of the retreat. Many fathers quickly reassured me that my son was a hero just like their children. In my heart, he already was my hero and still is. The love for him is still very strong, and I miss him. I miss him so much.

That evening was a turning point in my grief journey, the directional change in my path that has allowed me to live again. In finding my "new normal," I've also discovered that life doesn't have to be so gloomy anymore. I don't experience guilt when I laugh or have a good time with family, friends and colleagues. I'm living my own life and still remembering the life my son lived and the joy he brought to the world. Remembering his laugh and smile gives me joy still. Being able to live this new normal life and remember him without conflict is a great feeling.



The experiences have allowed me to explore my own feelings. I've bonded with other surviving men. I've learned that, in Big Sky Country, surviving a grief that seems unfathomable is best done with other men with the courage to face their own brokenness.

I now have been to the Montana Men's Retreat three years in a row. It's not just about the fly fishing, horseback riding, horseshoes, breathtaking panoramic views and solitude. Lifelong bonds are made as the men find the perfect environment to freely express feelings, both verbally and physically. During those few days in the vast wilderness of Montana, a brotherhood forms. There are no judgments of comments made or emotions expressed. Our loved ones' lives and accomplishments are celebrated as powerful stories are shared.

The experiences have allowed me to explore my own feelings. I've bonded with other surviving men. I've learned that, in Big Sky Country, surviving a grief that seems unfathomable is best done with

other men with the courage to face their own brokenness. I've looked around the room at a gathering or across the table while sharing a meal and have known that the face looking back understands. He understands that men are different from women, and we grieve and process loss accordingly. He understands the need to weep in secret, when no one can see or hear. No need for that in Montana; there, real men do cry. And we learn that crying is healthy and can be done anytime, anywhere. Even in front of others, including the women in our lives.

Supporting each other during these retreats comes naturally, and lifelong friendships are cemented. Support systems are created. Being told I helped someone else during the short time we

were in Montana is humbling, especially when it comes from multiple people. I never know what I have said or done to make others feel that way, but it's that great, warm feeling that brings me back each year. Being told I made an impact during my first two men's retreats convinced me to become a TAPS Peer Mentor.

And the support I've gotten from these men spills over into my relationships once I return home. I now know it's okay to expect others in my life to support me just as I support them. My wife does a great job of acknowledging when I need that support. And the skills I have gained have allowed my wife and me to take one step, one day at a time as we journey through grief together. No duct tape required. *



CALENDAR OF EVENTS |

MAY-SEPTEMBER 2017

MAY

23rd National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
May 25-29

JUNE

Green River Whitewater Expedition
June 8-12

★
North Carolina Good Grief Campout
June 11-14

★
Southern California Good Grief Campout
June 18-21

★
Germany Widows Gathering
June 21-27

JULY

Texas Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
July 14-17

★
Wisconsin Women's Retreat
July 16-20

★
Washington Family Retreat
July 20-23

★
Tennessee Family Retreat
July 31-August 3

AUGUST

St. Louis Inner Warrior Wellness Weekend
August 4-6

★
Washington Women's Empowerment Retreat
August 13-18

★
Machu Picchu Expedition
August 14-22

San Diego Inner Warrior Wellness Weekend
August 18-22

★
Atlanta Parents Retreat
August 22-26

SEPTEMBER

Mount Shasta Climbing Expedition
September 7-10

★
Tampa Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
September 8-11

★
Montana Men's Retreat
September 13-17

★
Baltimore Inner Warrior Wellness Weekend
September 15-17

★
Boston Widows Retreat
September 2017

★
Colorado Good Grief Camp Adventure
September 23-24

★
Colorado Dude Ranch All Populations Retreat
September 24-29



"This was the first place I felt truly understood. I will never forget this incredible trip or these warriors I now call sisters." - AMANDA SMITH.★

THANKING THOSE

Who Support TAPS

Messages of thanks from TAPS children adorned lighted trees at the 2017 TAPS Honor Guard Gala. Held on April 12 at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., these messages greeted more than 800 donors, supporters, senior administration and Pentagon officials and surviving military loved ones who came together to celebrate the lives of our nation's military heroes and the caring support families receive from TAPS.

"TAPS is about helping military families cope with loss. It's about keeping faith, and it's about lives that are changed," said Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Marine Corps Gen. Joseph Dunford. "So what TAPS really means to those of us that are still in uniform is that someone is always going to be there for us and our families, especially if we confront tragedy."

Some TAPS family members were in attendance and had the opportunity to personally thank those individuals, groups and corporations who provide TAPS with the means to accomplish its mission. They were able to share their experience, share their loved ones and provide tangible evidence of the healing that takes place when survivors are able to connect with their peers, share the journey and find renewed strength.

That strength was spoken by Jaclyn Mariano, surviving daughter of Air Force Reserve Master Sgt. Jude Mariano.

Jaclyn received the 2017 Ted Stevens Leadership Award for her efforts to take her experience and provide support to other military families facing the loss of a loved one. This Award is given annually to recognize survivors who have channeled their pain into purpose. Jaclyn spoke powerful words of courage and resilience that captivated all in attendance.

Also present were representatives from the National Basketball Association (NBA) and USA Basketball. While some, like 7-foot 7-inch former NBA player Gheorghe Muresan, towered over most of the guests, it was for their compassion toward some of our youngest and smallest survivors that resulted in the NBA and USA Basketball being given the inaugural TAPS National Community Partnership Award. Their personal engagement has supplied extraordinary memories for surviving families, including when USA Basketball team members carried photo buttons of fallen heroes with them as they traveled to the Olympics in Rio and brought home the gold medal.

"The sacrifices made by our service members and their families allow our teams, players, coaches and referees to participate in the game we love and bring the joy of basketball to fans round the world," said Mark Tatum, the NBA's Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer.

The gala culminated an exciting day for TAPS. Earlier, at a special luncheon, TAPS recognized the Military Mentor of



the Year, Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Davenport for his unwavering dedication as a mentor to young survivors through the TAPS Good Grief Camps and Campouts. TAPS founder Bonnie Carroll was joined by Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin to sign a formal Memorandum of Agreement, solidifying a cooperative partnership to assist families in gaining support and access to vital benefits and information.

The luncheon and gala offered a special time for those who support and have been touched by TAPS to gather for fellowship, honor, and remembrance. It was a time to recognize those who give of themselves to touch the lives of others, and to remember all those who have given their lives in service. It was a time to acknowledge the community of support and partners in care who sustain the compassionate and life changing outreach of TAPS.



If you're a survivor of suicide loss,
TAPS has a special place for you.

JOIN YOUR TAPS FAMILY

at the

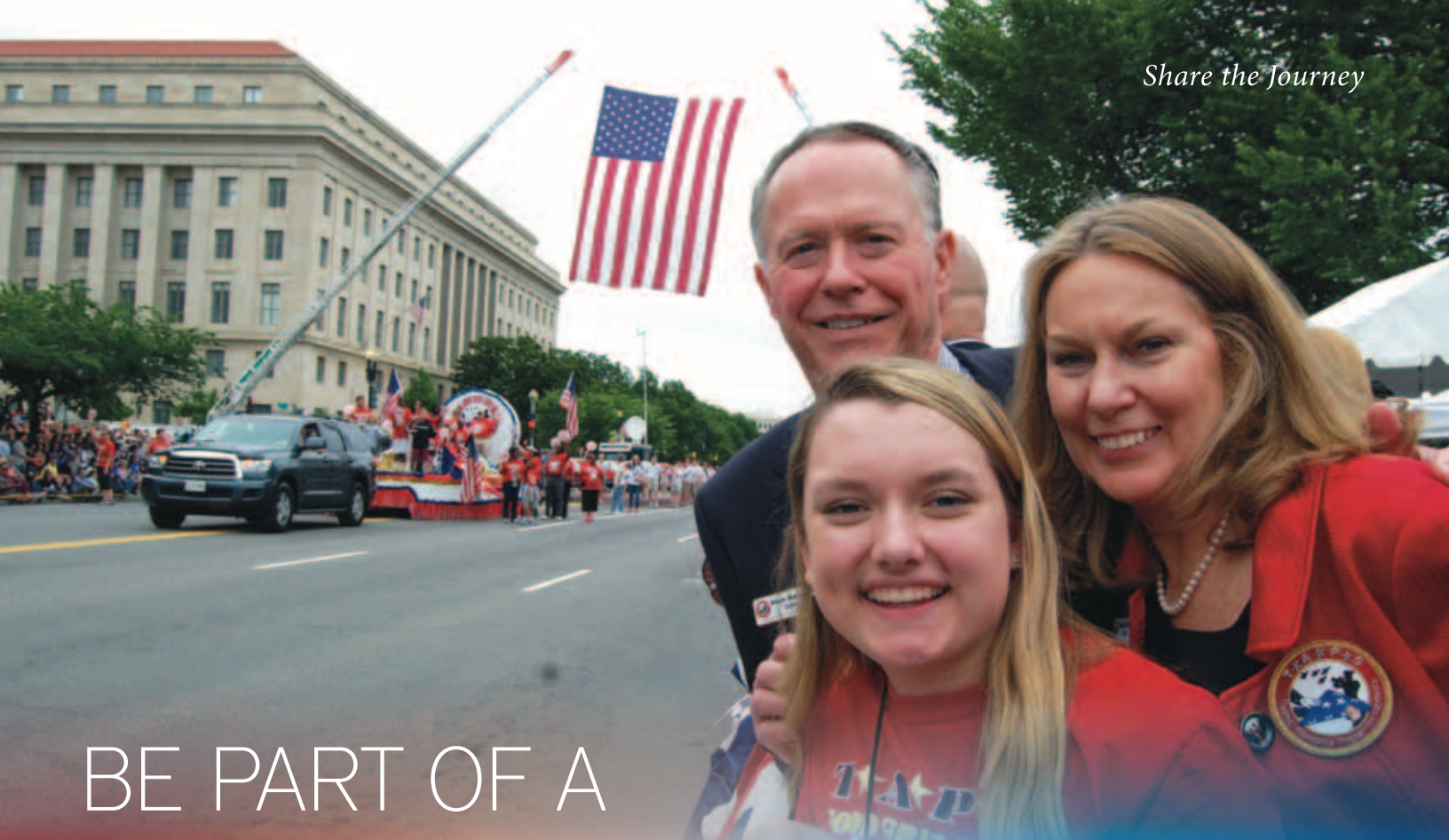
**2017 NATIONAL MILITARY
SUICIDE SURVIVOR SEMINAR**

OCTOBER 6-8, 2017
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

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

Find strength in your TAPS family, knowing you are not alone as we celebrate the lives of our loved ones. Find out more at www.taps.org/nmsss. Registration opens soon.





BE PART OF A

#GRATEFULNATION

This Memorial Day, there will be barbecues, parades, family gatherings and pool parties. For so many, Memorial Day is the unofficial start of summer. It's a time to celebrate.

The TAPS family chooses to celebrate too. We honor lives lived in selfless sacrifice. We pause to show our gratitude for our loved ones who served and died and we share the stories of their lives – their laughter, joy, kindness, intelligence and passion for their country. We remember the parent, sibling, spouse, child, battle buddy given to the country and the flag given to us in return, "On behalf of a grateful nation . . ."

Some of us may march in the National Memorial Day Parade in Washington,

D.C., and hold our loved ones close to our hearts as we wave to the crowd gathered on Constitution Avenue. Others may host an event in honor of our loved one like a 5K that raises money for a good cause. Some may take time to sit in a peaceful memorial garden, decorated with little reminders of our loved one's favorite things, to say a prayer. Some may take time to journal and write about someone special who made an extraordinary impact on the lives of others. And some may spend Memorial Day graveside to shed a few tears and share a few smiles as we remember our incredible family members who became heroes of a grateful nation. In celebrating them in big ways and small, we remind the country they loved to relish the freedom so graciously given by a sacrifice so selfless.

Where will you be this Memorial Day? No matter if you are a surviving family member or a supporting citizen, TAPS invites all across the country to take part in the #GratefulNation campaign. We encourage everyone - you, your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors - to log onto www.taps.org/gratefulnation and share how you and/or your community choose to honor the legacy of those who served and died. Post a photo on the digital quilt of a fallen hero you honor. Read the stories of surviving military loved ones. And see how others from around the country are remembering those we hold so dear.

AN Identity REDEFINED

By Ann Brothers
Surviving mother of Maj. Steven Brothers

During my son Army Maj. Steven Brothers' travels throughout the world, I never worried about his safety; I knew he was happy chasing his goals. Life was good. But then, Steven was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL), an aggressive blood dyscrasia, in March 2012. He was transported to Walter Reed Medical Center for chemotherapy from his assignment at the U.S. Embassy in Qatar. He remained optimistic and expressed a desire to return to duty in the Middle East; it was his mission to conquer cancer and continue his more than 14 years of service. We prayed for a miracle recovery, but Steven succumbed to a secondary infection on May 30, 2012, at the age of 35.

Watching Steven struggle with cancer, this harrowing enemy, broke my heart. I was numb during his illness and after his death. How could this happen to us? I was angry at the world, God and even Steven at times. I wanted to return to my home, get into bed and never get up. I didn't see hope and didn't care what happened to me.

I questioned my purpose in life. Was I still a mother even though my son and only child was now gone? I struggled with my new identity and role. When people asked how many children I had,

what was I to tell them? Many people wanted me to feel better, to be happy again, but how could I? I put on a happy face many days, but inside I was dying. I was no longer the person I once was. Happiness was a nebulous term. I had once known that feeling. I was left wondering if I would ever experience it again.

With the tremendous support from my loving, caring family, friends, TAPS Peer Mentor and minister from church, I eventually realized the only way through grief was to face it head on. And that was the path I chose.

One night, I dreamed Steven was trying to guide me down icy, slippery steps in a snowstorm. Independent in nature, I resisted his help. He persisted, saying, "I want to help you Mom. Please let me help you." The next day, as I reflected on this visit from Steven, I realized it was a sign he wanted to help me find my new purpose and meet my destiny. This gave me renewed hope. I could hear Steven saying, "Mom, suck it up." He would say this to me when I complained about exercise or a test of my will; he always saw a challenge as an adventure.

My anger slowly dissipated as I remembered more and more the attitude Steven had in life, always patriotic and always hardworking. I began to challenge myself. I could turn this terrible tragedy into something productive and make a difference in the lives of others. Steven held this philosophy dear. He always wanted to help others, working in a homeless shelter while attending college and mentoring those under his command in the military.

I knew I was making progress when I no longer needed to tell everyone I met or saw, whether it was a clerk at a store or a server at a restaurant, about Steven's death. I began talking about his life – what a kind, humble, terrific person he was. I wanted everyone to know his story, and what better person to tell it than me.

I learned that grief is a personal journey. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. I learned to be kind, gentle and patient with myself. I will always miss Steven and will never forget him, but in time, I have become accustomed to the redefined person I am. I no longer expect a call on my birthday or a visit at Thanksgiving. And, every day, I thank God for allowing me to be Steven's mother. I learned it is important, when you are ready, to talk to someone you trust about your thoughts, feelings and plans. I now know grief is real and it will wait on you. The only way to get through it is to walk the path, even when the steps are small, awkward and faltering.

I am confident I will see Steven again. Until then, I continue to look for signs – the scent of an unlit candle, butterflies playing in his memory garden at our home or dreams of his presence.

Since Steven's death, his father and I have made a decision to continue his mission of helping others. We established the Major

Steven Brothers' Leadership Scholarship through the Indiana University Foundation. Steven entered the ROTC program at Indiana University in his junior year, graduated and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1998. So, it's my honor to present a financial award to a deserving ROTC student who meets the same personal and professional standards Steven had. Through this award, I thank the ROTC cadets for their commitment to serving our country and protecting our freedom and way of life. I ask God to keep them safe and emphasized the importance of keeping in touch with family and loved ones just as Steven did.

My husband and I participate in bone marrow drives in memory of Steven, assisting in the organization and implementation of those held at Indiana University and one at an Army post close to our home. Steven's name will now be used in other bone marrow drives throughout the world. I want everyone to know his story.

I also have shared Steven's story at a local middle school, encouraging the youth to be proud of our nation. I urged the young citizens to support our veterans and currently serving men and women of the Armed Forces. I asked them to attend and take part in patriotic events, and I stressed the importance of learning about our flag.

Life is not always easy; a horrific thing has happened, and it has affected so many people. But I feel a renewed passion to carry on Steven's legacy and mission. My new role, as I see it, is to make sure Steven is never forgotten. In doing so, I feel a sense of peace and know that healing is taking place.

How have you found your new normal? Share your ideas at editor@taps.org. *



Compassion for ALL

By Heather Stang
Author of “Mindfulness and Grief”

If grief is the cold, dark winter, then compassion is the spring. Out of the pain of loss comes the recognition that we are all in this together, and we need each other to make it from one season to the next.

Fortunately, there is no shortage of compassion within the TAPS family. Strangers who have never met connect with one another wholeheartedly. United in the shared human experience of profound loss, we offer each other kind words, big hugs and an unconditional acceptance for any and all emotions that show up.

Compassion for others can help us build compassion for ourselves, which is an equally important mindset. When we practice compassion for all beings, including ourselves, we are not only more resilient during tough times—we are healthier, too.

Benefits of compassion

Biologically, compassion begins as a stress response. We witness someone suffering, and our fight, flight, freeze alarm gets triggered. We can either lean into the experience or turn away.

When we feel afraid or powerless, we tend to turn away. Maybe we are reminded of our own vulnerability in another’s pain. Or we can’t do anything to fix it. We witness large-scale suffering on television. We see a couple having a heated argument in the grocery store. Or we wake up at 5 a.m. to first responders bravely battling a house fire across the street.

Even when your intervention would be inappropriate, you can lean into the experience with your heart. You can pray. You can imagine sending well wishes. You can watch how your own body re-

sponds to suffering and acknowledge your shared humanness with the other person. No matter how different, we all experience joys and sorrows.

When we do choose to tend to someone else’s suffering, be it in thought, word or deed, our negative stress reaction is transformed into the more positive “tend and befriend” response. You are probably quite familiar with what that response feels like. Just remember the last time you helped a friend in need.

As you engage in compassion, you not only benefit the person you are helping, you benefit yourself as well. In her book “The Science of Compassion: A Modern Approach for Cultivating Empathy, Love and Connection,” researcher Kelly McGonigal surveys the many ways compassion impacts our physical and mental health, from increased immune functioning to a decrease in depression, anxiety and fear.



Of course, we don't choose to be kind to others because it decreases our chances of catching a cold. We do it because it is our heart's longing.

Core components of self-compassion

According to Kristen Neff, researcher and author of the book, "Self-Compassion: the Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself," self-compassion has three core components: self-kindness, a sense of common humanity and mindfulness.

Self-kindness

A little self-kindness can go a long way in grief. As much as you may like to rely on friends for support, your grief is also unique to you.

Self-kindness means you treat yourself as you would a beloved friend. Take time to comfort your own suffering rather than deny it through self-criticism and shame.

This is not self-indulgence. Self-kindness does not encourage bad behavior in the name of temporary relief—it's more permanent. As Neff explains, "[Compassion's] driving force is love not fear. Unlike self-criticism, which asks if you're good enough, self-compassion asks what's good for you?"

Common humanity

One of the key differences between self-pity and self-compassion is the acknowledgement that suffering is a common human experience. Self-compassion is uniting rather than divisive. This is why it is so easy to give and receive comfort to our extended TAPS family. We know we are on this journey together.

In the Mindfulness and Grief groups I facilitate, I incorporate the practice of Tonglen, which means sending and receiving. You can try this yourself at home, even if you aren't in a group. Imagine all the people in the world who are feeling what you are feeling.

Place your hand over your heart. As you inhale, say to yourself "May I be free from this suffering." As you exhale, say to all beings who are grieving, "May we all be free from this suffering."

Mindfulness

Credited with bringing mindfulness to the American mainstream, Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment."

Mindfulness gives us the opportunity to maintain a calm and balanced mind no matter what the situation. We have a better chance of reducing suffering when we act based on fact rather than habit. Mindfulness gives us a moment to pause before lashing out in self-condemnation. It gives us the space to remember that we too are worthy of compassion.

Take a moment to pay attention to the part of you that is awake and aware in this moment. Feel your breath rise and fall in your body. No need to analyze or interpret your experience, just check in with yourself.

Benefits of self-compassion

Self-criticism can act as a form of protection. For instance, many of us can admit to thinking, "If I criticize myself before you do, it might feel less painful. If I am self-deprecating in front of someone I see as superior, they may not perceive me as a threat." These are very real reasons why we are hard on ourselves.

But there are even more reasons to be kind to yourself. People who are self-compassionate are less anxious and depressed, experience fewer negative emotions and have less resistance to suffering. They also experience higher levels of emotional intelligence and have stronger emotional coping skills. Self-compassion has even been shown to reduce avoidance behavior in people with posttraumatic stress.

While it is important to practice self-compassion because you want to be kind to yourself, it is worth noting that people who are self-compassionate are much easier to be around than those who are hard on themselves. It is also worth observing that those of us who are self-compassionate do not see ourselves as superior to others. Instead, we see ourselves equal to others. Each one of us is worthy of love, kindness and compassion. *

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION:

SENDING AND RECEIVING WELL WISHES

The formal practice of loving kindness meditation—also known as metta meditation—involves sending a short verse in six directions as you visualize a particular being: yourself, a beloved being, a friend or family member, a neutral person, a difficult person and ending with all sentient beings. You can craft your own verse, or use the one below:

May you be happy, as I wish to be happy.

May you know peace, as I wish to know peace.

May you be free from suffering, as I wish to be free from suffering.

The informal practice of loving kindness meditation can be as simple as looking someone in the eye during conversation and silently wishing them "may you be happy." You never need to let them know!

Stream or download this free guided meditation at mindfulnessandgrief.com/compassion-meditation.

COMPASSION MEDITATION TIPS

- This practice is not about forcing yourself to feel a particular way, or condoning harmful behavior by another. Instead, it starts a conversation by allowing you to explore how you do feel.
- For the "difficult" person, start with someone who is a little challenging to be around. If you find you're having a hard time sending this person well wishes, either send the well wishes to yourself, or choose a less challenging person.

CONNECTION

JUST A *CLICK* AWAY

Connect to your community right from your computer, smartphone or tablet. Find out more at www.taps.org/onlinecommunity.

TAPS online grief support groups are here for you wherever you are in the grief process — and wherever you are in the country or the world. The TAPS Online Community allows easy, yet meaningful, connections among survivors.

Whether you want to share your story or just read how other survivors are sharing and coping, this online grief support community is a way for you to develop and strengthen your connections with your TAPS family from the comfort of your home.

As a gathering place for survivors, the TAPS Online Community hosts chat sessions for real-time conversations, message boards that provide space for questions and comments and peer-based sharing groups to drive conversation and connection. Online peer groups include adult children, contractor/government civilian loss, fiances, LGBTQ, parents/stepparents/grandparents, siblings, suicide loss survivors, TAPS Peer Mentors and widows/widowers.

Battlefield Promises

By Emily Muñoz ★ Surviving spouse of Capt. Gilbert Muñoz

This week, I followed along on Facebook as a friend, his wife and their church lived out a 2004 battlefield promise. I am still reeling from how they cared, how they mobilized and what the lessons are for us all.

An Army veteran who's pretty impressive with his handcycle, his integrity and his relentless pursuit of positivity, my friend Ed decided that, when his Iraqi interpreter's move to the U.S. finally started to become a reality, this time he would be the trusted voice in a strange land. With the interpreter's family making preparations to resettle, Ed and his team came through, and they came through big. A house was found and furnished. Medical services were donated. A refrigerator was stocked. Yesterday's foundation of trust became today's second chance.

More than a dozen years and a world away from combat operations in Iraq, when

their very survival depended on mutual trust, two families greeted each other at the airport, then journeyed together to enjoy the first meal in a safe home.

I don't think my friend ever personally guaranteed his interpreter a new life in the U.S. in exchange for knowledge and skills. I don't think they pinky promised one night before a mission. But that's what makes this even more powerful. We may not have gotten to make explicit pacts with our loved ones, but there's still that opportunity to show them that because they fought, we will, too.

The commitment is to be present, to persevere, to not forget, to dig deep and to trust that what you are doing matters. For these two friends, long years and hard days loomed before promises could be kept - days that included persecution for working with Americans, controversy over welcoming Iraqis, destruction, loss. Yet,

they chose to see those battlefield promises through - to make good on them.

Despite grief. Despite hardship. In the face of change. While feeling exhausted, broken, maybe even cast aside.

This makes me more certain than ever that we can keep those battlefield promises, too. We can live and grieve courageously, earnestly. We can reject shutting down. We can do exactly what we would have pledged in those hard moments: to take care of ourselves and each other, to try to find joy, to not give up, to ask for help.

My friend and his interpreter were in it together — they looked into a darkness they both had to face. Military families do this, too — we all know there is tremendous risk and overwhelming uncertainty. But we commit to making it. If making it with them isn't an option, making it for them always is. ★

HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH

Traumatic Grief

Judith Cohen, M.D.

In this season of rebirth with newly budding plants, more sunlight and warmer weather, you also may feel more able to renew yourself and grow. You may find that you are a little more able to make it through one more day, even amidst ongoing sadness and pain.

But self-renewal is challenging when your child is struggling. Although all grieving children are sad sometime, after a sudden traumatic death—as most military deaths are—some children may develop traumatic grief. Children with traumatic grief struggle with more than the sadness of typical grief. They have other problems not easily seen.

Recognizing your child with traumatic grief

Children with traumatic grief want to find comfort in the memories of their parent who died, but this can be difficult because such memories often remind the child of the traumatic way the parent died. Thinking about the death is very upsetting for children with traumatic grief, and they try to avoid these thoughts. The child may avoid all reminders of the parent, death or the military. However, avoidance is rarely very successful, and usually leads to worse traumatic grief problems such as those listed below.

Reminders may occur around certain times of the year (e.g., close to the anniversary of the deceased parent's death or birthday, military holidays or important family holidays). For example, Mother's Day and Father's Day occur in the spring, so a child with traumatic grief has more reminders of the parent who died, and he or she may have more difficulties around those times.



Recognize problems of traumatic grief in children

Recurrent distressing memories

- Upsetting thoughts or nightmares about the way the parent died
- Headaches, stomachaches or other distress when reminded of the death and or the parent who died

Avoiding reminders

- Not wanting to talk about, think about, have feelings about or remember the death or the parent who died
- Avoiding reminders of the death, the loved one who died or the military

Negative thoughts or feelings

- Bitterness, anger, self-blame or other strong negative thoughts or feelings about the death
- Difficulty with trusting others, being detached from friends or feeling lonely
- Loss of interest in usual activities or friends

Physical changes

- Trouble falling to or staying asleep or restless sleep
- Angry outbursts or irritable behavior
- Reckless or dangerous behavior
- Trouble concentrating
- Increased physical jumpiness

Help your child with traumatic grief

Fortunately, there are many ways you can help your child with traumatic grief. For example:

- Listen to what your child says with words, but also be aware that your child communicates in important ways to you through behaviors and physical changes.
- Encourage emotional expression. Draw, talk, play, read, act out charades or do whatever helps your child express feelings. You can model this by expressing your own feelings.
- Maintain important connections. Encourage your child to maintain and build positive social relationships with relatives and friends, but take guidance from your child—don't push too hard.

- Advocate for your child. Help other adults (e.g., at school, scouts, coaches, etc.) learn about and understand your child's traumatic grief reactions. Help develop a plan so these adults can support your child if trauma reminders occur in school or other settings. TAPS has resources to help education personnel working with children of military loss.
- Take care of yourself. In order to take the best care of your child, eat well, get enough sleep and regular exercise, and take time to attend to your own emotional needs. This will assure that you are modeling these skills for your child—and that you will be there for your child when he or she needs you most.
- Get your child professional help. Most children with traumatic grief benefit from professional counseling. You can locate a trained trauma counselor by reaching out to the trained professional at TAPS or at www.tfcbt.org.

TAPS has collaborated with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network to develop additional resources related to military childhood traumatic grief. These are available at www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/traumatic-grief/military-children. *



TAPS Youth Programs staff is trained in supporting children with traumatic grief. Go to www.taps.org/youthprograms to learn about opportunities for your child with TAPS.

By Kelly Griffith
Surviving sister of Maj. Samuel Griffith

It's that moment when we chose to lean in. A physical sign that we acknowledge our loved one is no longer here, leaning into grief can be one of the most difficult tasks. And yet, it can be one of the most freeing. We are given the opportunity to see hope in the darkness.

In the year after my brother Marine Maj. Samuel Griffith died, my parents saw the toll grief was taking on me, even though I could not, and decided I had to sign me up for my first TAPS Retreat. Still hesitant to even acknowledge that I had a right to grieve or that life had truly changed, I tried unsuccessfully to convince myself I could still stand up on my own. My mom drove me the two hours from Raleigh to Wilmington, North Carolina, for the retreat; she feared I'd get in my car and drive in the opposite direction. I didn't want to believe this was really happening – that I could live and breathe in a world where my brother no longer existed.

Throughout the weekend, I felt something I didn't think was even possible. As I leaned into my grief, I realized that there was someone there to catch me – my new family. I began to openly talk about Sam, letting myself laugh without feeling guilty, taking on my terrible fear of heights on a high ropes course. There was something so freeing about allowing myself to fall into the loving embrace of the TAPS siblings. They understood me.

Conversations about the person my brother was had become foreign to me in the wake of tragedy, which was an additional loss when I realized people no longer wanted to hear about the man I had always idolized as my hero. But these siblings knew that same heartache and welcomed discussions of Sam.

Sitting on a mossy log in the woods of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington campus in the southern heat and humidity, my life and perspective on

grief were further changed. Several siblings worked together on a teambuilding exercise - trying to move a stuffed pig without using their hands. Watching the activity, I sat alone for a few moments lost in my thoughts until another sister sat next to me and said five simple words, "Tell me about your brother." And I found myself leaning into my grief even more.

She hadn't asked how he died. She wanted to know how he lived, what kind of brother he was, how he served. After all, his death was one split second in his lifetime. It didn't define him. His life did.

Celebrating the life extended to every interaction I had with my TAPS family after that. I found hope as I listened to the stories of other surviving military loved ones at a care group. I felt a sense of healing as I watched the Alaskan Huskies pass by at the start of the 2013 Iditarod on another TAPS Siblings Retreat, and I realized that Sam was making a lifelong

LEAN *into*

GRIEF





Time and time again, we are always there for each other. We call each other 'sisters' and 'family' and support each other in ways that the rest of the world cannot.

dream of mine come true. I laughed with others as they described their loved ones' humor at the Marine Corps Marathon pasta dinner with Team TAPS. I allowed myself to cry with others on the TAPS Blog as I read their stories of loss and hope. I was encouraged by TAPS Facebook page posts. And I learned I wasn't alone; others were experiencing the same things.

Linda Turner, the surviving spouse of Marine Sgt. Kurt Turner, said she found a sisterhood when she allowed herself to lean into grief at a TAPS Women's Empowerment Retreat.

"We've shared many joys and pains, milestones and heartbreaks," Linda said of her newfound TAPS sisters. "But time

and time again, we are always there for each other. We call each other 'sisters' and 'family' and support each other in ways that the rest of the world cannot."

Raven Bren, surviving mother of Army Sgt. Phillip Anderson, said she felt hopeless, trying to find her way back to the person she was before her loss when she decided to attend an empowerment retreat.

"I was afraid I would come face to face with some new me, unable to accept or love who might emerge. And what really happened was I was embraced. These other women were so different, and in the rainbow of those differences, I was able to see my own reflection," Raven said. "There were moments of discomfort

when that reflection differed from my own self-perception and other times when the mirror simply reflected what was possible. I was gifted with tools to use, encouraged to work and invited to risk."

It is easier to acknowledge that our loved ones died when we realize our relationships with our loved ones still very much exists; they just look so different from anything we ever imagined. And it's easier to find a way forward when we realize we aren't alone on this path. When we lean into the grief, it can have the most extraordinary results.

Lean into your grief. Find beauty in your brokenness. And remember the extraordinary life lived. *



GET CONNECTED

Beyond the emotional exhaustion of grief, there's also the element of having your way of life upended. There are sudden employment decisions, financial planning choices, the grinding stresses of burial and benefit questions, the paperwork that piles up when we avoid it because certain boxes are too difficult to check.

At TAPS, we offer you the absolute best in survivor support, advocacy and casework assistance. As part of the TAPS family, you're connected to the peer professionals who make up the Survivor Care Team, the community counseling resources cultivated by our Community Based Care team and to all of the other resources TAPS provides to ease the way for military survivors.

Learn more about the ways we can help you connect with advocates, subject matter experts, peer professionals, community counseling and our trusted partners.

Visit www.taps.org/resources.

10 STEPS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF WHILE GRIEVING

Hope in the Storm

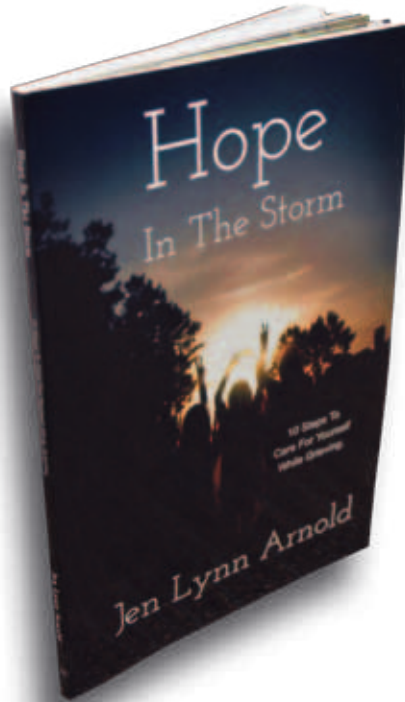
By Jen Lynn Arnold ★ Reviewed by Cheryl A. Kreutter, Ph.D.

Surviving mother Jen Lynn Arnold's "Hope in the Storm: 10 Steps to Care for Yourself While Grieving" is a book about opportunities: the opportunity to better understand the emotional and physical storms of grief (Why do I feel this way?); the opportunity to consider how to weather the storms (What might I do to help myself?); and the opportunity to draft a personal action plan (What steps might I consider toward self-preservation?). The author's warm, down-to-earth tone, the beautiful photographs, easy-to-read format and the invitation to journal within the pages of this short text provide survivors space to explore their grief.

The reader learns of Arnold's own grief voyage after the loss of her 12-year-old son, Tucker, to Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia in 2011. She acknowledges her own early feelings of shock and numbness that accompany grief, recognizing these as the mind's way of protecting itself. She cautions the reader that not facing the pain once the early phase is over can be self-destructive.

"I was forced to feel it all and forced to choose to deal with it rather than have it define me...I knowingly had to reach out to my pain rather than avoid it with positive platitudes. I had to decide that it would not rule my life. Easier said than done but the first step is to choose you over the pain."

Arnold encourages readers to consider the mind-body connection and how feeling good physically will help one feel better mentally.



Ten chapters provide a description of why and how each step should be considered:

1. GET ADEQUATE SLEEP
2. MEDITATE OFTEN
3. EXERCISE REGULARLY
4. TALK ABOUT IT
5. DON'T TAKE OPINIONS AND ADVICE TOO SERIOUSLY
6. EAT RIGHT AND AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS
7. HAVE A PLAN
8. FORGIVE YOURSELF AND OTHERS
9. VOLUNTEER
10. DON'T GO IT ALONE

For those on the journey of grief, these may be familiar maxims. However, what set this text apart are the author's succinct suggestions (i.e., the steps) for moving in positive directions followed by a challenge to the reader to make a plan in writing.

The invitation to journal right here, right now in the text sets this book apart. As a literacy professional, I have urged children and adults to write for insight, as there is great value in putting pen to paper while thoughts, feelings and ideas are fresh. I applaud the author for providing immediate encouragement and space for the reader to explore emotions and options for healing. She provides an opportunity for you to develop, in writing, a pact with yourself to "choose you over the pain." The author writes:

"Speaking about your loss will help your mind and heart grow to accept this new reality. Not speaking about it will hold your heart hostage in a state of denial that will eventually tarnish all that is still right and good in your life now."

Writing to gather and articulate your thoughts to yourself and others who share your journey opens opportunities to embrace others in a community and to assure that you are not alone.

Readers can use the text in various ways. For example, after reading the introduction and getting a sense of the text's layout, you may want to work through its pages from beginning to end, or randomly sample the chapters. After the initial read, however, the reader will be well-served to return to the text on other occasions, as its suggestions and plan are transferable to other life events.

Through engaging text and welcoming format, "Hope in the Storm" provides valuable resources and simple, straightforward actions to help you maintain physical and mental health throughout the grief journey.



Celia's nearly 250 hours of service annually is five times the number of hours served by the average volunteer each year.

Heart to Serve

Celia Aguilera

When Celia Aguilera was living in Bahrain with her Navy husband, their good friend and neighbor Yolanda Acevedo received the knock at the door. Celia will never forget that day because it was her birthday. Instead of celebrating, their tight-knit military community was mourning the great loss of a husband, father and friend.

Celia saw the Acevedo family, in shock in those early days abroad after their loss, grow into their new normal back in the United States. Yolanda and her family had attended the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar, retreats and Good Grief Camps.

"I saw her [Yolanda's] progression from needing the help of TAPS to being able to give back," Celia said of her friend.

After the Aguilera family made their way back to the United States, Celia's husband retired from service, and her sons joined the military. It was then no wonder Celia wanted an opportunity to volunteer with organizations supporting members of the

Armed Forces and their families. In 2010, Celia and her husband moved to northern Virginia. She began volunteering at Walter Reed after her eldest son, a Marine, deployed to the Middle East and her youngest attended the University of Virginia on an Air Force ROTC scholarship.

"My heart is drawn to the military," Aguilera said. "I always wanted to help. That's what we know; that's what we see."

Celia eventually decided she wanted to volunteer her time to support surviving military families, and she reached out to TAPS. She found that her Bachelor of Science in business administration and accounting, Bachelor of Arts in business administration and finance and 30 years of experience were fitting for some of the behind-the-scenes support TAPS needed.

In addition to the part-time job she still holds in accounting for another organization, Celia has spent nearly 15 hours each week for 18 months providing support to

TAPS welcomes new volunteers. Visit us at www.taps.org or email volunteer@taps.org.

the TAPS accounting, human resources and office support teams at its headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. Celia's nearly 250 hours of service annually is five times the number of hours served by the average volunteer each year. While she doesn't get as much face time with surviving families, she said her favorite part of this role is the opportunity to work with the staff and other volunteers, knowing what she does allows them to support all those who need the TAPS family.

"Celia has been an asset to the accounting department. She is a devoted, hard working volunteer who believes in the TAPS mission," said Courtney Nyren, TAPS Director of Finance and Accounting. "She gladly gives her time with a warm smile and positive attitude. She is a true gem and the organization is lucky to have her."

TAPS is honored to be the place where Celia can marry her experience, passion and service, and her contributions are essential to the success of the organization.



friends of TAPS

THOUSANDS OF Thanks

Just outside Detroit, in the community of Dearborn Heights, a special project to honor our nation's military began to take shape. Quilted squares served as the canvas for messages of thanks. One square at a time, the project gained momentum, and has flourished into a beautiful tribute to those who have served our nation.

Last fall, Venus Wilker, a paraprofessional at John F. Kennedy, Jr. Library, decided to host a military support project to involve local residents and bring awareness to all those who have served and died and the loved ones left behind. Knowing of many existing support projects, Wilker wasn't sure how to proceed. Someone at the local veteran cemetery connected her to TAPS.

After talking with TAPS, Venus had a direction and a goal. In February and March of this year, patrons of the library were invited to make quilt squares during their visits or at special craft parties. The community was invited to write messages on the quilt squares. The project brought together veterans and citizens, resulting in a greater understanding of military service and of families who are grieving the loss of a military loved one.

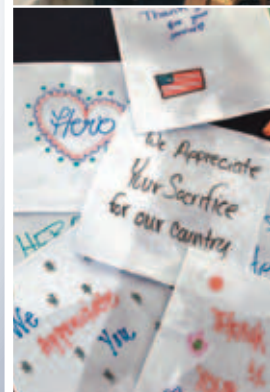
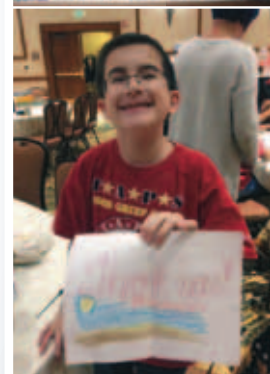
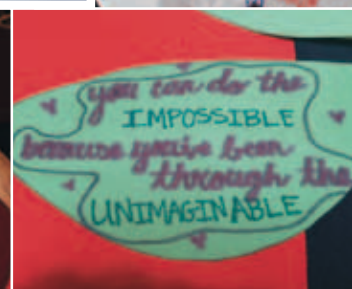
Each square, carefully crafted and adorned with messages of concern, support and care, was just the beginning of a greater vision to deliver comfort to families of the fallen.

After completion, the squares were sent to the TAPS headquarters and have been woven into overlays that will cover tables at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar annual dinner to be held over Memorial Day weekend. The concept is designed to provide a visual representation of a grateful nation, and to convey to surviving military loved ones in attendance they are not forgotten and their loved ones are remembered.

From a community in Michigan, the Thousands of Thanks project has garnered additional support across the country. Those who support the TAPS mission have joined in with special employee events. USAA, Northrup Grumman, Lockheed Martin and HSBC offered their messages to be woven into this wonderful tapestry, and Microsoft hosted a staff volunteer event "Breakfast with TAPS." New York Life Foundation plans to continue the program after Memorial Day as part of their 9-11 outreach.

These squares have come together, carrying much more than messages from America. With each stitch, with each word, a grieving survivor will be strengthened and touched by the generosity and kindness of others who gave their time and heart to reach out.

Want to support the Thousands of Thanks project? Communities, volunteer groups, corporations and other organizations can contact TAPS at volunteer@taps.org to receive more information and a Thousands of Thanks kit.





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TAPS offers *help, hope*
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grieving the death of a
loved one serving in
America's Armed Forces.

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ALL ARE WELCOME

Join your **TAPS Family**
AT A TAPS SEMINAR THIS YEAR

Experience the embrace of your TAPS family - the support and connection that await you at a TAPS Seminar. No matter where you are in your grief journey, you'll get to know other surviving military loved ones in a relaxed, welcoming setting over family-style meals, during workshops and while participating in special events.

Seminars are inclusive, discussion-based events that include workshops for understanding and processing grief and small-group sharing sessions where you can connect with peers. TAPS Seminars are held in conjunction with TAPS Good Grief Camps.

TAPS Seminars give you space to feel encouragement and hope that you can heal and pride in sharing your loved one with others. You'll leave a TAPS Seminar with information and inspiration, knowing you have been among people who understand.

Find out more at www.taps.org/events.

Texas Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
July 14-17

Tampa Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
September 8-11

San Diego Survivor Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
December 1-4

