

**TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS**

# T★A★P★S<sup>®</sup>

Comfort and Support Since 1994

**MAGAZINE**

**FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED**



*Share  
the  
Journey*

**VOLUME 20 • ISSUE 4**

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

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501(c)3 Veterans Service Organization which publishes TAPS Magazine in furtherance of its mission to support survivors whose loved one died while serving in the armed forces.

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



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# TAPS®

## Comfort and Support Since 1994

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

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

**Call us at 800-959-TAPS**  
**Or visit us at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)**

## TAPS

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

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

**HOSTS** the TAPS Online Community of survivors, providing secure chat rooms, message boards, blogs, peer group discussion sites, and an extensive website at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org).

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

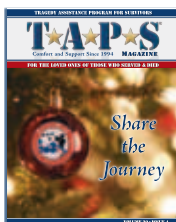
**CONNECTS** survivors to resources in their local communities and provides grief and trauma resources and information.

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# Let Us Hear From You



Tell us what you think, send ideas for future topics, or submit an article. Write to us at [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org). Your TAPS family is waiting to hear from you. ★

## Live, Love, Honor

Jon was my only child. When I returned to my house after my son's funeral, it was quiet. I remember reaching into a tote bag and picking up brochures. TAPS had a larger-than-a-postcard, but smaller-than-a-sheet-of-paper, mission statement with a phone number on it. That phone number became my lifeline. TAPS listened. TAPS connected me to resources. TAPS taught me not how to grieve, but how to live, celebrate, and honor not only my son, but all who served and died. It's the only resource reaching across all ages, eras, and causes of death of an Armed Forces individual.

**Sue Peney, Kentucky**  
Surviving mother of  
Sgt. Jonathan K. Peney

## Online Groups

When I first came on board I was totally silent, just watching the posts, most often unable to read more than a sentence or two without that pain overtaking my chest. And yet I was drawn to it every day, sometimes sitting reading for hours on end. Slowly, very, very slowly I would feel an internal permission to post a thought, to share a feeling. It was toe-in-the-water at first, but gradually I gained insight into myself via shared news and experiences. I owe this group here an incalculable debt of gratitude and affection.

**Marcia Tomlinson, Vermont**  
Surviving mother of  
A1C Patrick W. Tomlinson

## Paying It Forward

My experiences at TAPS, both as a mentee and mentor, have been a driving force for my love for my own community. The impact of mentors I've had is always with me. Having that guidance, sense of belonging, and support is immeasurable, and I only hope that I can give back what I have received. When I first had the idea to start a local indoor soccer program of my own, I thought maybe I was in over my head. But the beginning of TAPS came to mind. I remember there were only a handful of mentees when I first went to TAPS. So I thank you for the experiences I have been blessed with through your program.

**Sgt. Megan Kuszewski**  
Massachusetts  
Westover Air Force Base

## Casework Assistance

My son Andrew, an Iraq War veteran, died in a car accident last September and there were mistakes made when ordering a grave marker for my son. Kudos to TAPS for helping me to rectify the situation, so that my son will no longer rest in an unmarked grave. Thank you, thank you!

**Lydia Goodwin, Maine**  
Surviving mother of  
Andrew Ellis

## Moab Sibling Retreat

Over the last five days I have tested myself both physically and mentally, and I have had the chance to meet and know people who were strangers a week ago. I rafted down a river, ran, swam, and rappelled through canyons. I left blood, sweat, and tears in canyons and as I reached the top I screamed Ray's name in hopes he'd hear in heaven and that his name would forever ring through those canyons. Thank you for making this possible, encouraging people to give it their all and open their hearts to others. You have truly had an impact on my life. This last week has changed my life.

**Jerry Bevel, Texas**  
Surviving brother of  
Cpl. Ray M. Bevel

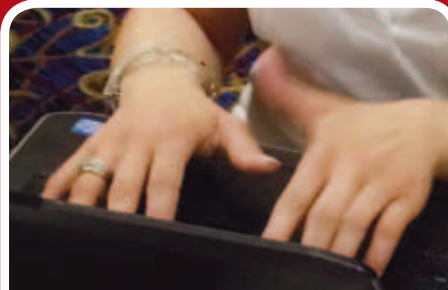
## Wisconsin Regional Event

I just wanted to thank you from my children and myself for an amazing weekend in Green Bay. This was our first time (in four years) that we got to attend a seminar and Good Grief Camp. The staff and volunteers were such a blessing.

**Kaanan Mackey, Iowa**  
Surviving spouse of  
Staff Sgt. Matthew L. Mackey



[editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org)



# TAPS Seminars

Dear TAPS Family, ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

When this issue reaches your hands, the holiday season will be upon us. While the rest of the world opens up with holiday spirit, those of us who are not at home in a world of celebration may be tempted to close ourselves off, shield ourselves somehow. Worn down by the powerful, insistent tug of how much is missing, we can feel out of place. We wonder if continuity of tradition will bring us comfort or if our traditions will no longer fit.

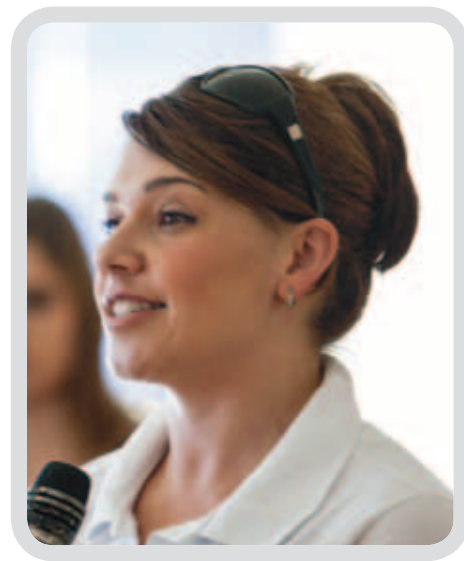
Every year, as the holidays approach, I am struck by this uneasy harmony between tradition and new beginnings, and am thus drawn to the story of the Magi. They left their homes and followed a star to a strange land, in search of truth and life. In the process, they were irrevocably changed by what they discovered, no longer comfortable with their old ways, and unable to return to their former lives. Their traditions no longer fit.

Regardless of our religious affiliation or lack thereof, this sounds familiar, right? Our lives have changed dramatically—the old world is no longer safe. Our very definition of “home” has changed, too. There has been too much change to simply go through motions that no longer seem to apply. We can’t go back to the way things were—the holiday celebrations when our families were whole—and we can’t fully embrace the beginning of a new year.

However, we may be able to take comfort in the idea that the season also can be a time of epiphany. According to the dictionary, an epiphany is a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something; an event that triggers an intuitive grasp of reality; an illuminating discovery or realization. An epiphany can be an opportunity for us to connect with our TAPS family, to know we don’t have to pretend we’re okay, to invest in the light that’s on the way.

This season, instead of trying to work around it or retrace the way you came to this moment, let your grief lead to an epiphany, by reminding you how this pain connects you to love, how there is a light for every darkness, and how you are still a gift to the world. Keep the traditions that bring you comfort, and adjust the others. It isn’t dishonoring your loved one or your family; it’s making a change that ensures life.

Our hope is that you will find a true understanding of how much your TAPS family cares about you and is here for you. During the days when you feel least at home in your world, take some time to reach out to TAPS, check our website, and see what we have planned for next year. Make yourself a cup of hot chocolate and call us if you need to hear another voice. Plan to dig in and get to know your TAPS family better.



Like the Magi of old, we can’t go back to the way we were. But together we can make this new place feel like a safe, if unexpected, home. You are not alone in a strange land. Your TAPS family is sharing this journey.

With warmth and care,

*Emily Clark Muñoz*

Senior Manager, TAPS Seminars

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For more information about TAPS events, visit [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) and click on Survivor Events or call 800-959-TAPS.  
.....



# Coping with Holidays

By Helen Fitzgerald, CT

When a loved one has died, holidays inevitably bring fresh memories and a re-experiencing of the pain of grief. The void appears again. If the death is recent, you might feel numb much of this holiday season, but next year's holidays may send a new wave of grief your way.

As unpredictable as grief is, one can expect that the holidays and other family celebrations will cause a huge wave of emotion. These events, once anticipated with joyous pleasure, are now often painful reminders that your loved one is not here to celebrate with you. The good news is that you can help yourself.

## IT MAY HELP YOU TO KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND

- ❶ Don't be surprised at the intensity of your grief. Feelings of anger, panic, depression, despair, guilt or regrets, fearfulness, and loneliness, as well as physical symptoms, feel stronger during this time. This is normal. It is not a setback; it is how grief is.
- ❷ Help yourself by gaining an understanding of the grieving process. Read a book on grief, attend a lecture, or attend a support group.
- ❸ Remember what has helped you earlier in your grieving—these techniques will help you again.
- ❹ Tell important people in your life that this is a difficult season and let them know what they can do to help. Don't expect people to remember or to know what to do.

❺ Don't be surprised if others struggle, too, or if you see others hesitate to speak of the person who died. They are probably afraid they will make you feel sad, and are unsure whether you want to talk about it.

Something to keep in mind as the holiday season approaches: for many, the anticipation of a holiday is worse than the actual day. Make a plan for the holiday that is approaching. If it is difficult to decide what you want to do, think about what you don't want to do. Discuss your plan with your family. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can ignore the holiday in hopes it will go away. Everywhere you look, you will probably be reminded that this is a holiday season. Stores will be decorated and there will be holiday ads in the newspaper and on TV. People will greet you with a "happy" or a "merry" something or other. And it is not a happy or merry time for you.

Holidays are different for each person. One particular holiday may be very difficult for you but a breeze for others. Halloween may not have much meaning for some, but if your family always hosted a huge neighborhood costume party, you will really feel your loss on that day. The following checklist can start you and your family on making the decisions about an upcoming holiday. Ask each family member to fill out a separate checklist, and then sit down and compare notes. \*

.....  
This article and checklist courtesy  
of American Hospice Foundation,  
[www.americanhospice.org](http://www.americanhospice.org).  
.....



## COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS CHECKLIST

Place a check mark by what you want to do this year.

Share this with your family or have them do one of their own and compare notes.

### HOLIDAY CARDS

- . . . . Mail as usual
- . . . . Shorten your list
- . . . . Include a "Holiday Letter"
- . . . . Elect to skip this year

### DECORATIONS

- . . . . Decorate as usual
- . . . . Modify your decorations
- . . . . Ask for help
- . . . . Let others do it
- . . . . Make changes, an artificial tree instead of real
- . . . . Have a special decoration for your loved one
- . . . . Choose not to put up decorations

### SHOPPING

- . . . . Shop as usual
- . . . . Give cash
- . . . . Shop through catalogs or the Internet
- . . . . Ask for help
- . . . . Shop early
- . . . . Make your gifts
- . . . . Give baked goods
- . . . . Shop with a friend
- . . . . Ask for help wrapping gifts
- . . . . Do not exchange gifts now, but later
- . . . . Make a list of gifts to buy before you go out

### HOLIDAY MUSIC

- . . . . Enjoy as usual
- . . . . Avoid turning the radio on
- . . . . Shop early before stores play holiday music
- . . . . Listen to it, cry, and allow yourself to feel sad

### TRADITIONS

- . . . . Keep the old traditions
- . . . . Attend holiday parties
- . . . . Don't attend holiday parties
- . . . . Go to an entirely new place
- . . . . Bake the usual holiday foods
- . . . . Buy the usual holiday foods
- . . . . Bake, but modify what you usually do
- . . . . Attend a religious service
- . . . . Do not attend a religious service
- . . . . Attend a totally different place of worship
- . . . . Spend quiet time alone
- . . . . Visit the cemetery
- . . . . Open gifts on the usual day
- . . . . Open gifts at another time

### HOLIDAY DINNER

- . . . . Prepare as usual
- . . . . Go out for dinner
- . . . . Invite friends over
- . . . . Eat alone
- . . . . Change time of dinner
- . . . . Change routine of dinner, such as this year, do a buffet
- . . . . Change location of dinner, eat in a different room
- . . . . Ask for help

### POST-HOLIDAY AND NEW YEAR'S DAY

- . . . . Spend as usual
- . . . . Go out of town
- . . . . Avoid New Year's parties
- . . . . Attend a New Year's party
- . . . . Hold a New Year's party
- . . . . Spend time with only a few friends
- . . . . Write in a journal your hopes for the new year
- . . . . Go to a movie
- . . . . Go to bed early

# The Calendar of Grief

By Marilyn Collins ☆ Surviving mother of Sgt. James S. Collins Jr.

While cleaning out the top of the closet in the front hall this summer, I saw a box I didn't recognize way back in the corner. I had just discovered the long lost television remote on top of it. Why would someone put the remote in the hall closet? Now, my memory is not what it once was, but I am pretty sure we never had the TV by the front door.

I took down the box and saw that it was addressed to me, but had never been opened. The return address was Apple Products. Why hadn't this been opened and put by the computer?

I felt a small sense of foreboding. It wasn't that it was strange to find something in an odd place (note the remote). But this was something I had absolutely no clue about. I stared at the box trying to jog some corner of my memory. It couldn't be something from the Army regarding Jim's death—all of that would have been done in person. Anything that was mailed later would have been opened immediately. I went to the kitchen, got a knife, and slit open the side of the package. When I saw the corner of what was inside, I remembered what it was.

Feeling like I had been punched in the stomach, I suddenly had to sit down. This box held the calendar I had created in the spring of 2007, a few months before

Jim's death that August. I looked at the picture of my son, his wife, and my grandchild on the cover. This was the Christmas gift that would remain forever un-given.

I remembered looking through hundreds of pictures and painstakingly scanning many of them, selecting just the right ones to place in the calendar. It was a delicate task.

There had to be just the right mix of old pictures of him, pictures of Jim with his son Dawson, and recent pictures to include his new bride. After hours of effort I had emailed it off to be printed.

When the calendar arrived, I had stuck it on my secret Christmas shelf—at least, I thought it was secret until a few years ago when my daughter told me that she and Jim, beginning at about age twelve, had opened and rewrapped all their presents and even practiced their looks of surprise and delight for Christmas morning.

After Jim's death, I had given some of the other gifts intended for him to Dawson or to Jim's friends. Seeing this box now reminded me of the other perfect gift we



*Photos courtesy of the Collins family*

hadn't even had time to purchase that year... Jim was a Red Wings fan. When he was home and we watched a game and the Wings won, he was in a good mood all week. If they lost, we all would find something to do somewhere else in the house for a couple of hours. When he deployed, I was instructed to save any mention of the Red Wings in the sports pages and mail them to him.

What do you get for a fan like that after he returns from a long deployment in Iraq? A pair of Red Wing season tickets, of course. But those tickets were never purchased, and now since Jim's death, my husband and I have an understanding that when there is a long television report on the Wings, we just switch the channel.

*But why hadn't I thrown the calendar away after Jim died?*

*Why had I saved it?*



But why hadn't I thrown the calendar away after Jim died? Why had I saved it? I still had all the pictures, and many of them scrolled by every day on my screen saver. I enjoyed seeing them and thinking back to the days those pictures made real again. I had even made Dawson more than one book of pictures to help him remember his dad. So, why did I keep this calendar when I already had so many wonderful memories?

One of my favorite memories was of one Thanksgiving we were expecting Jim home on leave. Two weeks before the holiday, I was on the phone telling my friend how excited I was that Jim would be home. Thanksgiving has always been a special time to me—no presents to worry about, no picnic to be ruined by rain. Just the family being together. I love setting the table the day before so I can do it slowly and enjoy all that gleaming crystal and china. I love making everyone's special recipes.

As I was telling my friend about Jim's arrival in a couple of weeks, I heard the front door open. My uniformed son suddenly walked around the corner, and I hurriedly hung up. Had his Thanksgiving leave been canceled? Had some deployment been moved up? Then I saw the grin on his face. One of Jim's more annoying traits was that he loved to surprise us. Everything was fine; he had just gotten a weekend pass and decided to drive home.

That Thanksgiving, like so many other times, I remember Jim telling us he was dieting and would only have one helping of scalloped potatoes—and then putting a third of the potatoes on his plate for his one helping!

As I pondered my memories, I realized how much the TAPS motto means to me and how it has helped me so many times. Now when I think about things I said (that I wish I hadn't) or things I did (that I wish I could undo), I remember the year Jim drove 900 miles, two times in two weeks. Just because he wanted to be with us. Just because he loved us. "Relive the regrets" must be the exact opposite of "remember the love." When those negative thoughts come, I remember the love and the drive Jim made twice.

So why hadn't I been able to throw the calendar away?

I thought about what that first year of grieving was like. There is so much about that year that I remember with horrible clarity, almost like a slow motion tape. But so much is lost to me forever. Our beloved Darcie Sims taught us with her popsicle analogy that we all thaw at our own rates. That year, I was still thawing.

How did we get through those first holidays without Jim? I know we went away to Canada for Thanksgiving, because it isn't celebrated there. For Christmas, we left very early for

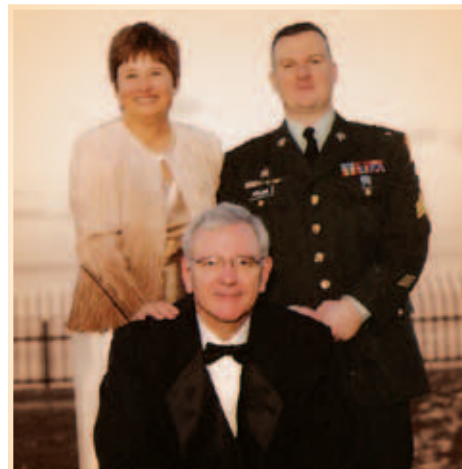
## *Throwing away the calendar would have been accepting the fact of that finality.*

our Florida condo, because decorated palm trees would hold no meaning to us compared with the snow and evergreens of a Michigan Christmas.

The worst thing about death, I think, is that it is so incorrigibly final. Jim will never come around the corner of the room to surprise me again. He will never sit at our Thanksgiving table again. He will never again have that "one helping" of potatoes. He will never have that calendar or those Red Wing tickets.

Throwing away the calendar would have been accepting the fact of that finality. In that first year, and perhaps for some years afterward, I wasn't ready. But now I had found the calendar near the eighth anniversary of his death. Was it an accident that I had misplaced it until I was ready to deal with it?

Now I could acknowledge the finality of our loss—not without a little anger, a lot of sorrow, and many tears, but finally with the hard-learned ability to concentrate on his life, the love he had for us, the great joys we shared together, and all the memories we cherish. We need no calendar to help us remember all of that. \*



# Healing Rituals for Holiday Grief

By Bobbi Emel, MFT

Holidays without your loved one can be painful and lonely. Especially if it's the first time the holiday has rolled around after your loss. Sometimes it's helpful to create a small ritual to help you remain connected to your loved one while still acknowledging your loss on this special day.

Get your closest friends together, the people you feel the safest with, and create a ritual to remember your loved one during a holiday. Or do the ritual by yourself. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

★ Write a letter to your loved one expressing your feelings during the holiday. Put it in a box and gift-wrap it. Then, put it under the Christmas tree or on a table—wherever you used to place it when your loved one was alive—and keep it as long as you like. Or try these ideas with your ritual group: bury the box in a special

place outside; burn the box and visualize releasing your feelings as the ashes float upward; have one of your friends open the box and read the letter to your ritual group.

★ Ask your ritual group to gather and have each person recall favorite stories about your loved one. You might want to structure it by having them tell stories about their holiday memories of your loved one, how they met your loved one, or what your loved one would say or do that would make them laugh the hardest.

★ Have an evening gathering at the graveside or memorial area for your loved one. Prior to the gathering, tell your ritual group to be prepared with poetry, a song, or a story about your loved one. Ask everyone to bring candles. Put a large unlit candle in the center of your gathering. As each person tells their story, have them light their own candle. When everyone finishes, have the whole group put their candles to the unlit one in the center and, as it lights, invite all to say a word or phrase to your loved one at the same time. Examples might be: "Blessings," "I miss you," "You are loved," "laughter," etc. End the ritual as you wish. Perhaps by having everyone blow out their own candles and meditating on the center candle. Or ask people to blow out their candles when they are ready. You blow out the center candle when you are ready.

★ At dinner for the holiday, ask everyone to close their eyes, and when ready, say the name of your loved one and

*Get your closest friends together, the people you feel the safest with, and create a ritual to remember your loved one during a holiday.*

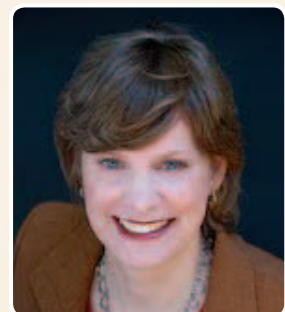
names of people your guests have lost. You can do this quietly to yourself, too, if you would rather not have the larger group do it.

★ Buy or make a card for your loved one at the holiday. Write a letter to him or her sharing your feelings and your journey of grief. Put the card aside in a special box. Do the same as each holiday passes. Not only have you connected with your loved one, you are also keeping a journal of your journey.

You are welcome to create any ritual you wish that will help you honor your loved one and ease this time of year for you. \*



## About the Author



Bobbi Emel is a psychotherapist, personal guidance coach, and certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator practitioner in the Bay Area of California. No stranger to personal grief, Bobbi shares her passion to help others on her website, [www.thebounceblog.com](http://www.thebounceblog.com), dedicated to helping people develop resiliency and bounce back from life's challenges.

# Christmas Without Chris

By Ami Neiberger-Miller ☆ Surviving sister of Spc. Christopher Neiberger

My brother, Army Specialist Christopher Neiberger, was killed in action in Iraq in 2007 at age 22. The last time we saw him was at Christmas time when he came home from Iraq on leave eight years ago. All of the last photos of our family together and the last times we spent together were at the holidays.

After his death, the holidays became very painful. We were always the kind of family that had a holiday routine and after he died, many of the things we had always done together hurt. The stockings my grandmother made for us years ago—that used to be hung by the chimney with excitement when we were kids—were so painful to look at, no one could even get them out of the box. It seemed like our joy was gone.

We can't always predict how the holidays will affect us. Those first holidays were awful. My stepchildren were out of town on Christmas that year, and we were rushing to get everything ready for our holiday celebration with them on the day they got back. I was crying so hard as I wrapped their presents that I had to call my husband, who was out doing errands, and ask him to come home. I was a wreck. I so desperately wanted to give our children the holiday they always had, but I was not up to it.

Cooking was hard, too. When I tried to cook for my stepchildren and husband around the holidays, I would burst into tears. All of the food reminded me of my family and what I had lost. I was so grateful that first year that my sister-in-law invited us over for Thanksgiving dinner, even though I was miserable and it was only a few months after Chris died. We visited

the cemetery that morning on the way to her house. Over time, it got better, and I could cook again.

Over the years, we have tried many things—being together at the holidays, leaving town for the holidays, and being apart for the holidays. We even took a cruise for Thanksgiving two years ago as a family, which was something I would have never even considered in the past.

Some of the family traditions that we stopped after my brother died have returned to us in new ways, because of the arrival of our daughter, who is now four years old. When she arrived, there was recognition in my family that we collectively wanted her to have happy memories of the holidays and to experience the traditions that mattered to us. But we had to find new ways to do them. Those old stockings assigned to each of us in our childhood remain in the box, but we have new ones now.



Looking back, I would say it was important to lean on others for help and support. You may be trying to muscle your way through the holiday season, but grief can bubble up and disrupt even the most steadfast resolve. Be gentle with yourself and cut yourself some slack. Do the things you are comfortable doing and plan an “out” in case it’s too much for you.

It is okay to change things if that feels right to you, and it is okay to keep them the same, too. If one person in a family insists on a particular tradition, assess the collective impact of it. Realize not everyone may know how they will feel about something until they are experiencing it.

If we are gentle with each other and supportive of what we all need, it makes going through grief at the holidays a little easier. We have held onto our customs as a family, but had to re-think our holiday traditions. It is still a work in progress for us. ☆

# To Watch or Not to Watch That is the Question

By Kelly Griffith ★ Surviving sister of Maj. Samuel Griffith

*It hurt tremendously to touch that part of my heart, to force myself into the realness of it all. But I feared that if I didn't look for those hurtful outlets, I wouldn't feel anything.*

Sitting in the darkened, crowded theater, I realized I had made a mistake. Why hadn't I picked the cutesy cartoon movie about dancing penguins? Why did I choose to resort to emotional cutting?

No. I would be fine. But I looked beside me and saw the looks on my family's faces and knew I had made a big mistake. It was just a few short months after Sammy's death on December 14, and we sat in a room filled with strangers who didn't "get it," watching *Act of Valor*.

The gunshots on screen rang in my ears and tore through my heart—right through that gaping hole left by Sam's death. I sat there and tried to tell myself it was just a story. It wasn't real. But the pressure in my chest told me otherwise.

This wasn't the first time I had tried to bump up the pace of the thawing process. Only this time I had decided to drag my family along for the ride. It's a wonder they didn't get up and walk out on me.

Just weeks after Sam's death, I started in on a project to find every newspaper clipping that had any mention of him. Be it the reprinting of his obituary or the

DoD notification of his death, I had to have them all, the *New York Times*, the *Marine Corps Times*, the *Raleigh News and Observer*. A large stack of newspapers still sits in my closet because I can't let go of them yet.

And I found myself scouring YouTube for videos of marines in combat, searching for any darkened silhouette resembling Sam, as fire was returned to the enemy in the night sky. Hearing the men call out, watching them go on patrol—I began having dreams of Sam's death. I've obviously never been to Afghanistan, but in my dreams, I've seen it all.

It hurt tremendously to touch that part of my heart, to force myself into the realness of it all. But I feared that if I didn't look for those hurtful outlets, I wouldn't feel anything. I kept emotionally cutting just to feel something. Anything. I was terrified that if I didn't hurt, I'd forget Sam. Somehow it seemed that his existence wouldn't matter if I wasn't suffering.



After watching *Act of Valor* with my family, I realized that Sammy's life would always matter. I wouldn't lose the hugs and laughs we shared, the quiet moments of just sitting next to one another, or the lessons he taught me, if I made a conscious effort to remember. I didn't have to hurt myself any longer in order to love and honor my brother.

Then Veterans Day rolled around that first year. It was the day my friend and I had always set aside to perform our ritual initiation into the Christmas movie season. She came to my house to watch our favorite cheesy holiday flick, *The Christmas Card*.



*Our reactions to media can be surprisingly difficult, whether we're a few weeks or several years out from the death of our loved one. But I've learned to be gentle with myself.*

Unlike the immediate days, weeks, and months of grief, I thought I was in a good place now. I was safe from the pain. And yet, I struggled through the movie, holding back tears.

In the film, a deployed soldier receives a Christmas card from a woman he's never met, through a program at her church. When his battle buddy falls in combat, the main character takes the personal effects to his friend's fiancée, and ends up finding the woman who wrote the Christmas card in the same town.

How could watching such a cheesy movie remind me of Sam? Was it the soldier killed in action with the worst special effects I've ever seen? Or was it that Sam never got the last Christmas card I wrote to him? Or maybe the smiles on the characters' faces as they made gingerbread cookies and sang carols together, all the while knowing my brother wouldn't get to celebrate his favorite holiday ever again?

I never really figured out the answers to those questions. Probably, it was a mixture of them all that brought the painful emotions flooding in. Even now, when the first few bars of Lee Brice's "I Drive Your Truck" or Carrie Underwood's "See You Again" fill my car when I'm in traffic, tears come before I can change the radio to something upbeat.

Our reactions to media can be surprisingly difficult, whether we're a few weeks or several years out from the death of our loved one. But I've learned to be gentle with myself. It helps me personally to take a few minutes alone when I want to watch or listen to something I think may bring on a tough reaction.

I chose to watch *Patton* by myself recently. I had wanted to watch it since Sam became a major and took a Patton pose photo in front of a large flag. I knew there was a good chance I'd cry, and I was right. In one scene, a hero falls on the battlefield, and General Patton shows sincere care as he is laid to rest. While I cried, I also saw the beautiful tribute to all of our fallen heroes in his act of kindness.

I now take breaks when I watch a military-themed show or movie, when I read a newspaper article that hits a raw spot in my heart, and when I look at the gap in my social media timeline as my whole world stopped in 2011.

And I've learned my limits. I don't walk into the room if I know someone is playing "Call of Duty." I never finished watching the *Band of Brothers* series. I deleted "If I Die Young" by the Band Perry from my iTunes account, replacing it with a song I heard at a TAPS siblings retreat, Flogging Molly's "If I Ever Leave This World Alive."

As the holidays draw near, bringing with them extra time for watching movies and listening to songs of the season, try these suggestions from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. Always ask yourself if it's necessary to expose yourself to the movie, television show, video game, or song. Most times, it's not. Wait until a film is out of the theater so you can watch it at home where you can pause it, get up and take a break, grab a snack, or talk to others watching along with you. And read up on a film before deciding to watch it. When in doubt, it might be better to wait.



After viewing a film, it's important to be able to talk about your emotions with friends and family. But remember that others may not be in the same place in their grief journey as you are. TAPS is available twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week to offer support when you call 800-959-TAPS.

This year, as my friend and I prepare to watch *The Christmas Card* again, I plan to multitask. I'll be writing Christmas cards to my family and friends while I watch the film. And I think I'll share a special memory of Sammy in each one. \*

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For more tips from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, visit [www.cstsonline.org](http://www.cstsonline.org) or search for "Powerful Movies, Powerful Memories of War."  
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# Embracing the Sadness of Grief

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

*In every heart there is an inner room, where we can hold our greatest treasures and our deepest pain.” ~ Marianne Williamson*

Sadness is a hallmark symptom of grief, which in turn is the consequence of losing something we care about. In this way you could say that sadness and love are inextricably linked.

When you are grieving, it is normal to feel sad. I would even argue that it is necessary to feel sad. But why is it necessary? Why does the emotion we call sadness have to exist at all? Couldn't we just move from loss to shock to acceptance without all that pain in the middle?

The answer is that sadness plays an essential role. It forces us to regroup physically, cognitively, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

When we are sad, we instinctively turn inward. We withdraw. We slow down. It's as if our soul presses the pause button and says, "Whoa, whoa, whoaaa. Time out. I need to acknowledge what's happened here and really consider what I want to do next."

This very ability to consider our own existence is, in fact, what defines us as human beings. Unlike other animals, we are self-aware. And to be self-aware is to feel sadness but also joy and timeless love.

I sometimes call the necessary sadness of grief "sitting in your wound." When you sit in the wound of your grief, you surrender to it. You acquiesce to the instinct to slow down and turn inward. You allow yourself to appropriately wallow in the pain. You shut the world out for a time so that, eventually, you have created space to let the world back in.

## The Dark Night of the Soul

While grief affects all aspects of your life—your physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual self—it is fundamentally a spiritual journey. In grief, your understanding of who you are, why you are here, and whether or not life is worth living is challenged. A significant loss plunges you into what C.S. Lewis, Eckhart Tolle, and various Christian mystics have called "the dark night of the soul."

Life suddenly seems meaningless. Nothing makes sense. Everything you believed and held dear has been turned upside-down. The structure of your world collapses.

The dark night of the soul can be a long and very black night indeed. If you are struggling with depression after a loss, you are probably inhabiting that long, dark night. It is uncomfortable and scary. The pain of that place can seem intolerable, and yet the only way to emerge into the light of a new morning is to experience the night. As a wise person once observed, "Darkness is the chair upon which light sits."

## The Necessity of Stillness

Many of the messages that people in grief are given contradict the need for stillness. "Carry on. Keep busy. I have someone for you to meet." Yet, the paradox for many grievers is that as they try to frantically move forward, they often lose their way.

Times of stillness are not anchored in a psychological need but in a spiritual necessity. A lack of stillness hastens confusion and disorientation and results in a waning of the spirit. If you do not rest in stillness for a time, you cannot and will not find your way out of the wilderness of grief.

Stillness allows for the transition from "soul work" to "spirit work." According to the groundbreaking thinking of psychologist Carl Jung, "soul work" is the downward movement of the psyche. It is the willingness to connect with what is dark, deep, and not necessarily pleasant. "Spirit work," on the other hand, involves the upward, ascending

*The only way to emerge into the light of a new morning is to experience the night.*



movement of the psyche. It is during spirit work that you find renewed meaning and joy in life.

Soul work comes before spirit work. Soul work lays the ground for spirit work. The spirit cannot ascend until the soul first descends. The withdrawal, slowing down, and stillness of sadness create the conditions necessary for soul work.

## Liminal Space

Sadness lives in liminal space. *Limina* is the Latin word for threshold, the space betwixt and between. When you are in liminal space, you are not busily and unthinkingly going about your daily life. Neither are you living from a place of assuredness about your relationships and beliefs. Instead, you are unsettled. Both your mindless daily routine and your core beliefs have been shaken, forcing you to reconsider who you are, why you're here, and what life means.

It's uncomfortable being in liminal space, but that's where sadness takes you. Without sadness, you wouldn't go there. But it is only in liminal space that you can reconstruct your shattered worldview and reemerge as the transformed you, ready to live and love fully again.

## Sadness and Empathy

Another evolutionary and still relevant reason for sadness is that it alerts others to the thoughts and feelings that are inside you. We all know what someone who is sad looks like. His posture is slumped. He moves slowly. His eyes and mouth droop. Being able to read others' sadness is useful because it gives us a chance to reach out and support them. In centuries past we intentionally made our sadness more evident as a signal for others to support us. We wore black for a year, and we donned black armbands. We literally wore our hearts on our sleeves.

Sadness elicits empathy—which is a close cousin to love. Empathy and love are the glue of human connection. And human

*Your pain is the key that opens your heart and ushers you on your way to healing.*



connection is what makes life worth living. Receiving and accepting support from others is an essential need of mourning. If you try to deny or hide your sadness, you are closing a door that leads to healing.

## Your Divine Spark

Your spiritual self is who you are deep inside—your innermost essence, stripped of all the external trappings of your life. It is who you were before you took on your earthly form, and it is who you will continue to be after you leave it.

It is your soul, or divine spark—what Meister Eckhart described as “that which gives depth and purpose to our living.” It is the still, small voice inside of you.

When you are grieving, your divine spark struggles like a candle in the wind. Many hundreds of people in grief have said to me variations on, “I feel so hopeless” or “I am not sure I can go on living.” Like yours, the losses that have touched their lives have naturally muted, if not extinguished, their divine sparks.

When you are depressed, you no longer feel the warm glow of your divine spark inside you. Instead, everything feels dark and cold. The way to relight your divine spark is to turn inward and give your pain the attention it needs and deserves.

## Honoring Your Pain

From my own experiences with loss as well as those of thousands of grieving people I have companioned over the years, I have learned that you cannot go around the pain of your grief. Instead, you must open to the pain. You must acknowledge the inevitability of the pain. You must gently embrace the pain. You must honor the pain.

“What?” you naturally protest. “Honor the pain?” As crazy as it may sound, your pain is the key that opens your heart and ushers you on your way to healing.

Honoring means recognizing the value of and respecting. It is not instinctive to see grief and the need to openly mourn as

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something to honor; yet the capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn. To honor your grief is not self-destructive or harmful, it is self-sustaining and life-giving.

You have probably been taught that pain and sadness are indications that something is wrong and that you should find ways to alleviate the pain. In our culture, pain and feelings of loss are experiences most people try to avoid. Why? Because the role of pain and suffering is misunderstood. Normal thoughts and feelings after a loss are often seen as unnecessary and inappropriate.

Unfortunately, our culture has an unwritten rule that says while physical illness is usually beyond your control, emotional distress is your fault. In other words, some people think you should be able to “control” or subdue your feelings of sadness. Nothing

could be further from the truth. Your sadness is a symptom of your wound. Just as physical wounds require attention, so do emotional wounds.

Paradoxically, the only way to lessen your pain is to move toward it, not away from it. Moving toward your sadness is not easy to do. Every time you admit to feeling sad, people around you may say things like, “Oh, don’t be sad” or “Get a hold of yourself,” or “Just think about what you have to be thankful for.” Comments like these hinder, not help, your healing. If your heart and soul are prevented from feeling the sadness, odds are your body may be harmed in the process. Your grief is the result of an injury to your spirit. Now you must attend to your injury.

You will learn over time that the pain of your grief will keep trying to get your attention until you have the courage

to gently, and in small doses, open to its presence. The alternative—denying or suppressing your pain—is in fact more painful. I have learned that the pain that surrounds the *closed* heart of grief is the pain of living against yourself, the pain of denying how the loss changes you, the pain of feeling alone and isolated—unable to openly mourn, unable to love and be loved by those around you.

Yes, the sadness, depression, and pain of loss are essential experiences in life. You are reading this article because you are feeling this and are struggling with the depression. Acknowledging that depression in grief is normal and necessary—even if the people and the culture around you are telling you that you don’t have to feel depressed, that there are ways around the pain—is one significant step on the pathway to healing. The next step is understanding if your depression may be what is called clinical depression and, if so, having the courage and self-compassion to seek help. \*

*You will learn over time that the pain of your grief will keep trying to get your attention until you have the courage to gently, and in small doses, open to its presence.*

#### About the Author



Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a respected author and educator on the topic of healing in grief. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado’s School of Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt has written many books designed to help people mourn well so they can continue to love and live well, including *Loving from the Outside In*, *Mourning from the Inside Out*, from which this article is excerpted. Visit [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com) to order Dr. Wolfelt’s books.



*You are cordially invited to attend*



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**MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR &  
GOOD GRIEF CAMP FOR YOUNG SURVIVORS**

★ MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND ★

May 22 to 25, 2015

Washington, D.C.

*Join us for a weekend of hope and courage  
in an atmosphere of understanding and support.  
Share the journey as we honor our loved ones.*

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

# 2015 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Join us as we *Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey.*

Since our first national seminar in 1995, TAPS has welcomed all those who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving in the Armed Forces, providing a full weekend of events for adults and children. Whether you are new to TAPS or have been part of the family for many years, you'll have the opportunity to make connections with other survivors, learn new coping skills, participate in healing activities, and honor your loved one. There is also plenty of free time for relaxing and visiting with your newfound friends.

If this is your first year to attend our national event, be assured that we want you to feel comfortable and supported. Special groups for newcomers will meet on Friday, giving you a chance to get to know others who are starting their own grief journeys.

All our activities—whether they are workshops, sharing groups, offsite activities, or special evening events—are structured to provide resources and information to help you continue to heal. Nationally known grief experts will be on hand to provide

support and training. Equally important, you will be connecting with other survivors, all walking a similar journey through grief. The four-day event begins with registration and opening sessions on Friday and ends Monday afternoon after attending the Memorial Day Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery or the National Memorial Day Parade.

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



## ★ REGISTRATION ★

Registration is now open and space is limited. Go to [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) and click on the Survivor Events tab on the left side. Your registration fee assists TAPS in covering the cost of selected meals, workshop materials, TAPS shirt and tote bag, and ground transportation to all off-site events during the four-day conference. The registration fee for children attending the Good Grief Camp assists with the costs of meals, transportation, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials. Along with these tangible items, you will take home the memories of the weekend and the lasting connections with other survivors.



## ★ ACTIVITIES ★

### PEER MENTOR TRAINING SURVIVOR CONNECTIONS

If you are eighteen months beyond your own loss and ready to be there for others, we offer a full day of training on Thursday, May 21, 2015. You will learn more about grief, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team. Register for the peer mentor training as part of the general registration.

Small group settings offer gentle, supportive discussions that allow you a chance to share with others who are facing similar experiences. Some groups are topical discussions and some are reserved for specific relationships.

### WORKSHOPS

Our topics meet you where you are in your grief and include topics such as understanding complicated grief; coping with new family dynamics; and special issues facing children, parents, siblings, and significant others. We also offer workshops that explore alternate methods of expressing grief through art, writing, music, meditation, and yoga.

### BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Through the stories of others we can gain perspective, insight, and new compassion for our own stories. Join us, whether you have read the book or not, to learn more about others' journeys.

### EXCURSIONS

Rock climbing, kayaking, walking the labyrinth, and guided tours of an art museum can be used as metaphors for our grief journey. Join us off-site as we explore active ways of learning coping skills for grief.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Special concerts, ceremonies, and tours in Washington, D.C. give you a chance to get out and experience our nation's capital. We have both traditional events (Marine Corps Evening Parade, Pentagon tour, Arlington National Cemetery) and new venues, so register early and keep checking the website.

### GOOD GRIEF CAMP

TAPS Good Grief Camp is America's first established program for children and teens whose parent or sibling has died. In our unique model, children are paired with trained mentors who support them as they share, learn coping skills, and have fun in a place where they feel they belong. TAPS offers a parallel program, Honoring Heroes Camp, for children who may not need grief coping skills, but still are part of the military heritage. Because children grow and face different developmental stages, each with its own new challenges in the grief journey, children aged four to nineteen are encouraged to attend. Childcare is offered for children three years old and under.

### SURVIVOR SANCTUARY

The Survivor Sanctuary, set aside as a quiet place for adults, is a retreat for sitting, reflecting, and processing—a space to take a break and draw apart for a time. It opens each morning with a time of meditation and closes with vespers in the evening.

# 2015 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

**Start planning now to attend TAPS 21st National Military Survivor Seminar. Online registration is open, and space is limited. Go to [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) and click on the Survivor Events tab on the left side. Then select the National Military Survivor Seminar for the link to registration.**

## ★ LOGISTICS ★

- All events and workshops for the 2015 seminar take place in (or depart from) the comfortable and inviting Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, Virginia. Additional rooms will be available at the adjacent Crystal City Marriott, which is connected by an underground walkway.
- Both hotels offer complimentary airport shuttle service to Ronald Reagan National Airport. (Flights into Dulles or BWI require transportation by taxi, train, or SuperShuttle with fares ranging from \$45 to \$70.)
- Each hotel offers an on-site restaurant in addition to a fitness center, indoor pool, and access to the Crystal City Shops and eateries. Room amenities include TV, telephone, clock radio, hair dryer, iron and ironing board, and coffeemaker/tea service.
- To make your hotel reservation, visit the seminar webpage at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) to get our special conference rate of \$129 per night. The last day you can register for the seminar and reserve a room is Tuesday, April 28, 2015.
- For information about free airfare through Fisher House Foundation's Hero Miles program, please check the seminar information pages on the TAPS website. The last day to apply for Hero Miles is Saturday, March 14, 2015.
- Events begin with check-in on Friday, so plan to arrive by 9:00 a.m. on Friday, May 22. Departure should be scheduled two hours after the end of the event you attend on Monday, May 25, to allow for our return from the event. For example, if you attend the ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, schedule your travel after 3:00 p.m. since the event ends at 1:00 p.m. Our last scheduled event is Monday evening.
- The seminar registration fee of \$195 includes selected meals, workshop materials, ground transportation to all special events, and a TAPS shirt and tote bag.
- The Good Grief Camp registration fee of \$75 per child assists in paying for selected meals, transportation for field trips and events, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.
- A limited number of scholarships are available if you are facing financial challenges. Please call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS or email [scholarships@taps.org](mailto:scholarships@taps.org) for more information. The deadline to request a scholarship is Tuesday, April 28, 2015.



# What Do You Say, Dear?

## Handling Holiday Invitations

The winter holiday season arrives each year just when we may feel like pulling the covers over our heads and ignoring it altogether. Invitations to parties and festive events arrive like clockwork. We are torn because we are not sure if we are ready to celebrate, and we long for the days before our loved one died. Here are some coping strategies on how to deal with invitations, shared by members of the TAPS Online Community.

a (fill in the occasion) right now. Can I take a rain check for another time?" The most important thing to remember is that we do not have to provide a personal explanation. If a well-intentioned friend or family member presses for one, we can simply say, "I'm sorry, but I'd prefer not to talk about it right now." You have the right to provide explanations and information on your own terms.

my heart. I wasn't ready to be surprised with that since my son was killed in a paratrooper accident.

I try not to commit to certain things ahead of time, because when the day comes, I may not want to go.

Sometimes I will politely decline saying, "Thank you for thinking of me. I'm not really ready to do that." Or "Thanks, but this is a tough time, and I think I'll pass, but call again. Who knows? Next time I may be okay." If I'm with other people and need to be alone, I just excuse myself and go somewhere to be alone. I've found that sometimes it's necessary to have a few minutes to cry, regroup, and just breathe.



**From Merry, surviving mother of Wesley:** The first year I was able to say, "Let me check my calendar" or "I would love to attend. I'll pencil that in and get back to you." If I did attend, I made sure to give myself an exit plan in case I felt uncomfortable. The second year is just about over and I probably would say the same thing and have the same boundaries in place, too. If an activity is short—two hours or less—I can handle that. Otherwise, I tend to need to move on to something else.

**From Joanne, surviving spouse of Ken and author of Military Widow:** It's perfectly okay to say, "Thanks for thinking of me. I'm not sure I'm ready for

**From Diane, surviving mother of Caleb:** I was always that person who had a hard time saying no. After the death of my son, I thought I should make myself go out and do things. Sometimes I'd find that it wasn't the right thing for me. I would struggle through and come home thinking, "Why did I make myself do that?"

I've learned to listen to my heart a little better. At our county fair, I usually go to the military commemoration night. This year I didn't feel comfortable going, and told a friend I'd meet her there if I was up to it. I didn't go. The next day I found out a paratrooper holding a flag opened the event. I was glad I had listened to

**From Mary-Ann, surviving mother of Blake:** Most people who ask me to do something are aware of what has gone on in my life, so I feel comfortable enough to tell them, "Maybe another time." Or "Today is not one of my better days." Last week I planned to go to a funeral to be there for my friend whose husband died of cancer. Then I realized he was retired military. I just didn't think I could handle a flag-draped casket, so I decided to help with the reception instead. I feel she understood since she knew I was working in the background. I've learned that if I try to push myself too hard when I'm not feeling strong enough, I end up falling apart or being depressed for days. It is just not worth it to me. I hope others understand. ★

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If you would like to receive the TAPS Saturday Morning Message each week, please ask to be added to our list by writing to [online@taps.org](mailto:online@taps.org).  
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# Give Yourself the Gift of Memory

By Bob Baugher, PhD

“How long has it been?”

Bereaved people are often asked this question. I ask it of you. How long has it been? Now answer this question. How long does it feel like it's been? A common answer is, “On one hand it feels like yesterday. On the other, it feels like a long time ago.”

Why do we experience our lives like this? How can something five or ten years ago feel recent, yet something that occurred last week can feel forever ago? You hear it all the time. Life is short. Time goes by so fast. It seems like only yesterday that ...

**How can something five or ten years ago feel recent, yet something that occurred last week can feel forever ago?**

One way to think of memories is to put them in terms of nouns, then verbs. What are the memorable nouns in your life: the persons, places, and things? And what did you do with, to, or for these folks? What did you do in the places you went? What did you do with the things in your life?

Another way to categorize memories is in terms of the senses involved: sights, smells, tastes, touches, and sounds. In other words, we can categorize life memories in terms of the information taken in by our senses about what we did with, to, or for the people, places, and things in our lives.

## Why We Forget

Let's say that you've lived twenty, forty, or more years. Why don't you have millions of memories at your disposal? One reason is because your mind works efficiently to store events into categories. For example, let's say that every year for the past ten years you went on vacation at the same ocean location with the same people. You drove the same route, rented a room at the same place, played on the same beach, made similar sand castles, watched TV, played games, and did much of the same things. Ten years of this would likely get categorized by your brain as one or perhaps a few events at the beach. Unless, of course, something different or distinctive happened to make it memorable.

## Flashbulb Memory

An example of this is what psychologists call flashbulb memory. It happens when a unique and significant event suddenly is thrust into our lives: September 11, the death of a loved one, winning a championship game, the moment we learned we got our first job. One theory why traumatic events and extremely joyous events are so ingrained in our memories is that the sudden upsurge of adrenaline permanently etches the event into long-term memory.

It's as if a self-protective mechanism is hard wired in your brain in an attempt to protect itself from future harm or to forever retain a cherished moment. In the face of what it deems a significant event, your brain commands, “You will not forget this, even if you try.” Thus, remembering flashbulb events takes no effort.



## The Brain and Memory

What we have with the human brain, therefore, is an efficient organ that categorizes most events into mundane soon-to-be-forgotten life experiences, because they are of little consequence. But as a protective device, this same organ automatically stores events that exceed the boundaries of common experience. What does this tell us about our own memories? Of course, we can't make every event in our life memorable. But there is something we can do. We can find ways to retrieve less distinctive life events.

## Types of Memory

There are different kinds of memory. One type, short-term memory, can begin to fade after a few seconds or minutes and may be completely gone after a half hour. Quick. Go back to exactly one week ago and try to remember brushing your teeth that morning. Go back exactly one month ago and conjure up eating your evening meal. Here comes the obvious reason for your lack of memory: unless there was something distinctive about the event, it's gone.

The other type of memory is long-term memory. It is stored in our brain and will stay there unless it fades over time. We do have memories of events stored long ago that can be retrieved if only we have the proper triggers.

## Retrieving Memories

Let's look at the concept of time and try to make some sense of it. Scientists tell us that time can be measured in two ways. One is by a unit of measurement such as seconds, days, or years. For example, how old are you? Virtually everybody answers this question in years. Another way to measure time is by events. How many events of your loved one's life do you remember? How vivid are they? What are the triggers of these memories? As the months and years pass, many people fear forgetting events in their loved one's life.

## If we practice bringing up memories from time to time, we can reinforce the images and transcend the time gap between then and now.

I have a suggestion to help you call up positive memories whenever you wish.

1. Take out a pen and paper and write a list of every memory that immediately comes to mind. Don't worry about details for now. Just write.
2. Find a label for each of the memories.
3. Go through each memory and create as much detail as possible. Describe the setting, what was said, colors, temperature, smells, sounds, touches. Make a story out of the event.
4. Assign a number to each label.
5. Practice saying a number and immediately bringing up the full memory of the event. Practicing this for a few days can create a very powerful list of quite wonderful memories that you can access at will. The numbered list can be carried on a 3"x5" card for easy referral.

Picture a father standing in line at the grocery store. His son died two years ago, and he has recently put together a list of ten of his favorite memories. As he stands in line, he says to himself, "I'm going to think about number five for a few seconds." He associated this number with the time he and his son took wind-surfing lessons at the lake. He sees his son being shown the fundamentals by the instructor, practicing on land, bending his knees, shifting his weight, getting into the water, climbing on the board, and attempting to stand. He smiles as he sees both his son and himself fall off the board again and again. He nods at the beautiful scene in his mind of his son proudly standing and gliding across the water with the sun and blue sky in the background. He reaches the checkout, pays his bill, and walks out of the store somewhat comforted by a memory he knows he can bring up whenever he wants.

Give this technique a try, but be careful not to get upset if you don't have crystal clear memories. Think of a time in your loved one's life and use the steps above to create your story from the memories you have.

Our brain functions in such a way that we are aware of the passage of time and we understand that some memories are "older" and more distant than others. However, if we practice bringing up memories from time to time, we can reinforce the images and transcend the time gap between then and now.

Of course, focusing exclusively on the past and ignoring the present is not healthy. But as you know, memories are all you have. Why not use them? \*

### About the Author



Dr. Bob Baugher is an instructor at Highline Community College in Des Moines, Washington, where he teaches courses in psychology, death education, human relations, and suicide intervention. He has given hundreds of workshops on grief and loss across the U.S. as well as in England, South Africa, and Namibia. He earned a certificate in Thanatology from the Association for Death Education and Counseling and in the 1990s he was a clinician with University of Washington School of Nursing Parent Bereavement Project. Bob has written eight books on the bereavement process.

# Healthy Actions for Holidays While Working Through Grief

For many survivors, working through grief is a matter of letting it take its course. The more survivors try to fight off their grief, the worse it can be when it finally hits them. Some people do not want to express the grief because they see it as a sign of weakness. Others find it difficult to experience their grief because they must acknowledge that not only is their loved one really gone, but that their life is altered forever.

The best way to start working through your grief is to first accept the death and understand that everyone needs to grieve in their own way. To do so, there are several things to consider when grieving:

- Grieving can be a long process, so be patient with yourself.
- Speak to your physician and/or mental health professional.
- Utilize resources around you such as your church congregation or support groups.
- Stay as healthy as possible.
- Be cognizant of how you treat your spouse, partner, and friends.
- Know that holidays and special occasions may be difficult and do not hesitate to lean on family and friends during those times.
- Realize that most people are not able to take enough vacation from work or daily activities to be able to get through the grieving process but must resume their daily lives while still in emotional turmoil; do your best to cope with the grief and do not be afraid to ask others for help every step of the way.

A loss of appetite is normal when experiencing grief, but eating nothing for an extended period of time can have adverse effects on your health. Try to keep healthy snacks and water around you so if you do feel hungry, you can avoid filling up on snacks and beverages that don't nourish you. Even if you can't bring yourself to eat three meals a day, try to have several small meals or snacks throughout the day. And drink as much water as possible.

## Sleep

Sleep is also an important aspect of health that needs to be considered. The effect of grief on people's sleeping patterns varies from person to person. Some people sleep all of the time and find it difficult to get out of bed to perform daily tasks. Others have difficulty sleeping and find themselves lacking the rest their body needs to function. If this is the case, try remedies that have worked in the past such as warm milk, soft music, or reading. At the very least, rest your body by meditating or sitting in a quiet place.

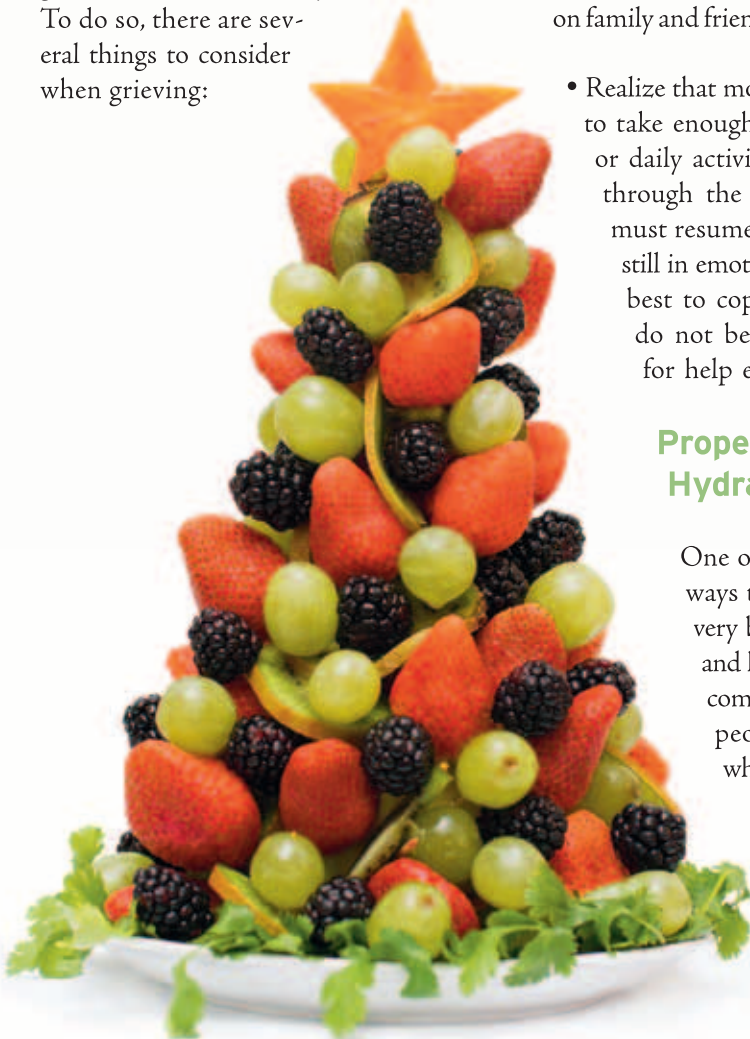
## Proper Nutrition / Hydration

One of the most important ways to help yourself heal is very basic: proper nutrition and hydration. It seems like common sense, but many people will stop eating when they are grieving.

## Healthcare

If possible, make your primary physician aware of the loss you've suffered so they can help you monitor your health while you move through your grief. Getting through grief can take a very long time and if you are unaware of your physical health, having an outsider to help monitor it is important. They might also be able to suggest a counselor or support group that can be helpful.

**Try to keep healthy snacks around, so you can avoid filling up on snacks that don't nourish you.**





## Avoid Drugs and Alcohol

Stay away from drugs and alcohol. While they may seem to temporarily help with the pain, they offer no long-term solution. If your physician offers you sleeping pills, be sure to follow the prescribed dosage to avoid addiction.

## Support Systems

A counselor, support group, church, or synagogue are just a few of the outside resources you might use to help yourself through the grieving process. Family and friends are also good resources and, though it may be difficult, asking them for help may be instrumental to your healing. Some survivors feel that the community in their local church is also helpful; attending services with the congregation can be enough to help work through grief, as well as the specific services offered by the church community and congregants.

## Feeling

Many support systems recommend taking care of you first. It might seem selfish, but it's important that you give yourself whatever you need to work through the grief. For some people, that means more alone time. For others, it might mean rewarding oneself or pampering oneself occasionally. Unfortunately, some survivors have a tendency to punish themselves when they are grieving, as if grieving is wrong. This is not a recommended course to take. You need to give yourself the latitude to work through your feelings, and punishing yourself will only prolong your struggle. Allow yourself to experience your feelings, whatever they are. Whether you need to cry, shout, or laugh, allow yourself to experience the feelings that come. One helpful tool for understanding these emotions and expressing them safely is journaling. Sometimes the simple process of writing can help you feel less burdened and give you a better sense of how and what you feel.

## List the items that need to be done for your holiday celebration and delegate tasks to friends and family.

## Relationships

Sometimes our relationships can be damaged when we are grieving; some people respond by pushing everyone away, including spouses and close friends. This happens for a number of reasons and usually is a result of how we individually respond to grief. It is important to share how you're feeling with loved ones so they know what you're going through. If you are having a particularly bad day, for example, communicate this so your spouse or friends know how to react if you get angry or frustrated. Remember: only you know what's going on inside your head and heart. You cannot expect others to understand without telling them. If you and your spouse or friend are both grieving over the same loss, remember that everyone grieves differently and neither of you is right or wrong; you are each different.

## Holidays and Special Occasions

Holidays and special occasions can be extremely difficult, especially when coping with the loss of a parent, spouse, or child who was actively part of the celebrations. In addition, many cultures anticipate and plan for upcoming holidays months in advance, which can be just as painful as the actual occasion. Many survivors can be sensitive to the role their loved one used to play and find it hard to reassign tasks or make up that vacancy in other ways. Know that everyone else is probably feeling similar, even if they don't express it.



To help everyone cope, one idea is to list the items that need to be done for your holiday celebration and delegate tasks to friends and family. The tasks that were traditionally done by the deceased will be the hardest to plan, but you can try to carry on their traditions by using their recipes or completing tasks the same way they would. In fact, these special occasions are often a good time to start memorializing the deceased, to take time out to remember how much you loved them and how much they meant to your friends and family. Sharing stories and photos of them might be therapeutic for everyone involved.

There's no need to pretend that you're okay and you're not feeling the loss; experiencing it is part of moving on. \*

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# The New Year

By Sascha Wagner

The New Year comes  
When all the world is ready  
For changes, resolutions—great beginnings.

For us, to whom  
That stroke of midnight means  
A missing one remembered,  
For us, the new year comes  
More like another darkness.

But let us not forget  
That this may be the year  
When love and hope and courage  
Find each other somewhere  
In the darkness  
To lift their voices and speak:  
Let there be light.

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## About the Author

Sascha Wagner is the surviving mother of Nino who drowned when he was three years old and Eve who died by suicide on the 15th anniversary of his death. After spending thirty years in various areas of mental health work, Sascha initiated a professional support service for persons with panic disorders or agoraphobia. In 1998, she was honored with the award for The Compassionate Friends Professional of the Year.

# Books for the Holidays

Reviewed by Betsy Beard ☆ Surviving mother of Spc. Bradley Beard

The winter holidays, with their emphasis on miracles and gifts, are difficult for those who grieve. While the hearts of others are lifted in merriment, our hearts seem to grow heavier with thoughts of our loved one and the gaping hole they left in our lives. Here are some books that can help fill the void and bring extra support at this time of year. ☆

## *Thoughts for the Holidays*

BY DOUG MANNING

As a counselor and minister, Doug Manning gives the reader permission to find his or her individual way to cope, remember, and survive the emotional hurdles of the season in *Thoughts for the Holidays: Finding Permission to Grieve*. Regardless of your faith background or lack thereof, getting through the holiday season from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day can be difficult. The winter holidays include days that are important to all faiths as well as holidays that are specifically American. Manning addresses an often overlooked aspect of grief: exploring how your faith may have altered. The 24-page booklet is a quick read with down-to-earth comfort that is heartfelt and real. No saccharine-coated homilies here.

## *Healing your Holiday Grief*

BY ALAN WOLFELT

*Healing Your Holiday Grief: 100 Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebration During the Holiday Season* was written as a guide to help us blend (not ignore) mourning with celebration in a way that will work for us and our families. The text is arranged with bullet points for easy reading, followed by suggestions designed to help you "do something with your grief, right here and now." By giving us suggestions of activities that are easy to complete, the guide gives us a concrete manner of expressing our grief in a way that is helpful and meaningful.

## *Holiday Hope*

COMPILED BY THE EDITORS OF  
FAIRVIEW PRESS

*Holiday Hope: Remembering Loved Ones During Special Times of the Year* is based on a program developed by Fairview Health Services for those who have suffered the death of a loved one. Spanning many of the holidays throughout the year, entries include short essays, poems, advice, personal stories, and artwork. More than a dozen therapists, counselors, clergy, and death educators contributed to this volume to share coping tips and techniques that address Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Memorial Day, birthdays, and anniversaries.

## *How Will I Get Through the Holidays?*

BY JAMES E. MILLER

*How Will I Get Through the Holidays? 12 Ideas for Those Whose Loved One Has Died* by James Miller is a small book with short chapters, perfect for people who are finding it hard to concentrate while grieving. As the holidays press down on those who are bereaved, they can find various ideas in this book that will help them plan, channel grief, and navigate the predictable rough waters of the holiday season. Sprinkled throughout the book are helpful quotes by well-known authors and poets, each one giving food for thought. Additional resources can be found listed in the back of the book.

## *When the Holidays Hurt*

BY NAN ZASTROW

Following a death, the holidays can be a devastating time for mourners. As a bereaved parent, Nan Zastrow writes from experience, covering a variety of topics designed to help you manage the holidays in *When the Holidays Hurt: Practical Ideas and Inspiration for Healing Grief*. In this collection of articles and essays, Zastrow gives suggestions for coping, finding joy, taming the holiday blues, and working things out in the context of family. She explores the myths of grieving during the holidays and explains how to blend old holiday traditions with new.

# Education Support Services

By Ashlyne Haycock ☆ Coordinator, TAPS Education Support Services

My dad, Sergeant First Class Jeffrey Haycock, died while training to deploy in 2002 when I was only ten years old. Education was extremely important to him; he actually made me learn all fifty states and their capitals before I started kindergarten. Pursuing a higher education was not optional; his kids would go to college. When he died, attaining his dreams for us seemed uncertain. I always knew, though, that I would go to college, even if I didn't know how my family would pay for it.

I applied and was accepted to the college of my choice, The American University. Getting that acceptance letter was one of the proudest days of my life. I missed my dad terribly in that moment of not being able to share my joy and our success with him. Through a combination of benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs,

FAFSA, and a lot of student loans, my mother made our family's budget stretch to get me there. I was incredibly grateful for her diligence and sacrifices to make this happen for me.

Then, during final exams of my sophomore year of college, my mother died. With no parents, my college finances became not only a monetary struggle, but a paperwork nightmare as well. I learned you cannot change your filing status for benefits from your parent's name to your own right before your senior year of college. I also learned that no one really wants to give a loan of \$30,000 to a 21-year-old who has no one to cosign the loan. I was about to lose the dream of a college education within a year of graduating.

I called Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and was connected to the Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation (CFPF). They approved grants for me to cover my tuition and helped me to pay off existing loans. I was able to graduate because of the connections TAPS made and the financial support of CFPF. I graduated on time and without debt.

With my degree in hand, I went to work for my TAPS family to help others the way I had been helped.

We realized there was no one-stop shop for information on education benefits and scholarships for surviving military families, so Bonnie Carroll asked me to work on that. I am honored to share some of the amazing resources TAPS now has available to surviving families.



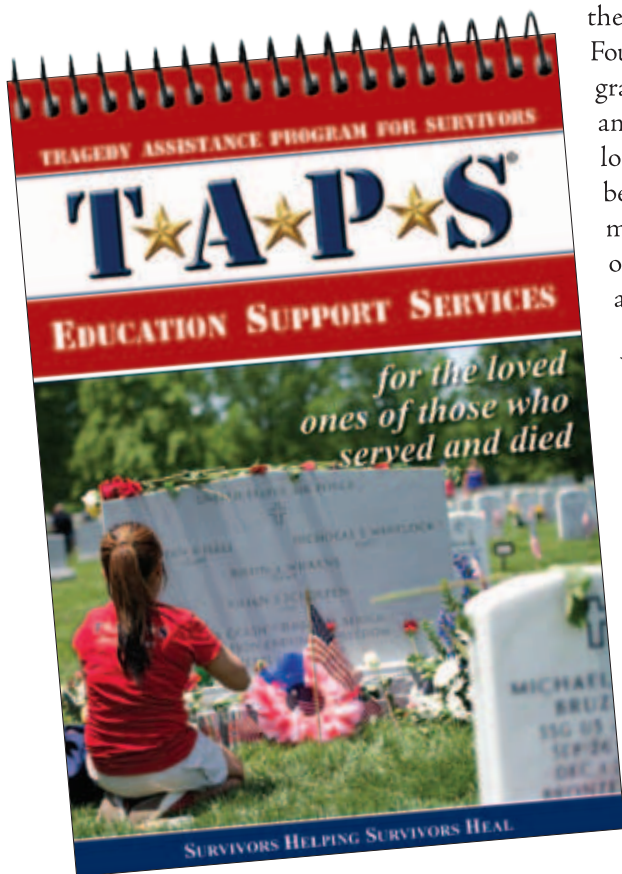
*Bonnie Carroll with TAPS supporter and IntelliDyne founder and president, Robert Grey, and TAPS survivor Lina Caboteja at September launch of Education Support Services.*

▲ In May 2014, TAPS signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Veterans Affairs to assist surviving families in accessing VA education benefits such as the Fry Scholarship and Chapter 35 benefits.

▲ In August 2014, President Obama signed into law an expansion of the Fry scholarship. Beginning January 1, 2015, surviving spouses of those who died in the line of duty will now be eligible to receive this benefit. TAPS Education Services staff members can answer any questions you may have about this amazing new benefit.

▲ TAPS developed an Education Support Services Quick Series guide, similar to the TAPS Survivor Guide and our Benefits and Finances Guide. You can request one of these by emailing [education@taps.org](mailto:education@taps.org).

▲ On September 30, 2014, TAPS launched the Military Survivor Education Support Services Program at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. It was attended by senior officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs, White House representatives, and leadership from major



scholarship organizations. The program provides information and eligibility for education benefits and scholarships for surviving families. You can check it out at [www.taps.org/edu](http://www.taps.org/edu).

▲ TAPS now has full-time Education Support Services staff to assist survivors with any education related questions, including benefits, scholarships, and college applications.

As the Education Support Services Coordinator, I have been asked all sorts of questions about scholarships and benefits during the last year. One of the most frequently asked questions regards scholarship application due dates. While the federal benefits do not technically have a due date, it is important to apply as early as possible since it can take up to ninety days to get a Certificate of Eligibility. To further help, see the information on application deadlines for some of the key scholarships available to surviving families. \*

To learn more, visit [www.taps.org/edu](http://www.taps.org/edu), write us at [education@taps.org](mailto:education@taps.org), or call 800-959-TAPS and ask for Education Support Services.

#### About the Author



Ashlynn Haycock graduated from American University in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in political science. Before joining the TAPS staff, she attended Good Grief Camp as a child for seven years and as a volunteer mentor for four years. She now serves as the Education Support Services Coordinator, helping survivors access education benefits.



## APPLICATION DEADLINES

### UNLOCK SUCCESS

BENEFITS POSSIBILITIES  
**SCHOLARSHIPS**  
 COLLEGE OPEN DOORS  
 SUPPORT REACH

#### Surviving Siblings

##### Matthew Freeman Project

- \$1,000 scholarships for siblings of those who have died in the line of duty
- No application due date

#### Surviving Spouses

##### Aspire

- \$3,000 scholarships per semester for spouses of those who have died on active duty
- Applications due by October 31 for spring semester and June 30 for fall semester each year

##### National Military Family Association

- \$500-\$2,500 scholarships for surviving spouses of those who died while on active duty on or after September 11, 2001
- Applications available from December 1 to January 31

##### Pat Tillman Foundation

- Amount varies, scholarships for surviving spouses of those who died on active duty, in veteran status, or in retiree status.
- Applications available from February 1 to March 6

#### Surviving Children

##### Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation

- No set amount, available for children of those who died in the line of duty or of a service-connected disability
- No application due date

##### Freedom Alliance

- Scholarships of up to \$5,000 for children of those who died in the line of duty
- No application due date

##### Fisher House Foundation- Heroes Legacy Scholarship

- Amount varies, for children of those who died while on active duty on or after September 11, 2001
- Applications available from early December to March 14

##### Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation

- \$30,000 for children of those Marines killed in action; amount varies for children of those who died by other causes
- Applications available from January 1 to March 1

##### Special Ops Warrior Foundation

- Amount varies, for surviving children of Special Operations Service Members who died in the line of duty
- Applications due at least sixty days prior to the start of the semester

#### Multiple Relationships

##### Army Emergency Relief Fund

- Amount varies, for surviving spouses and children of soldiers who die while on active duty or in retiree status
- Applications available from January 1 to May 1

##### Folds of Honor

- \$5,000 scholarships for surviving spouses and children of service members who die in the line of duty or from a service-connected disability
- Applications available from January 15 to March 15

# Spotlight on Service

## ★ John Rhoten ★

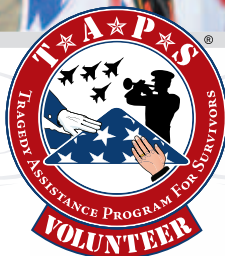
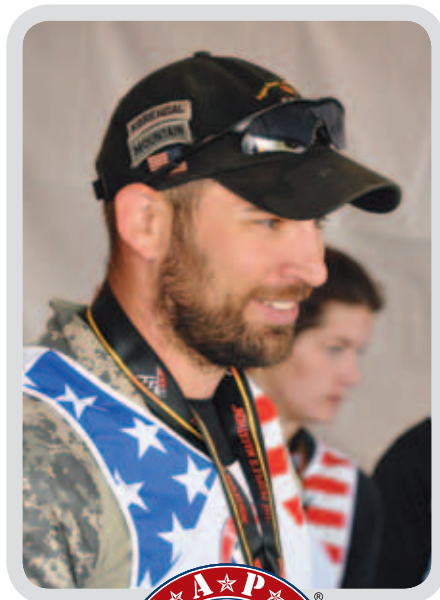
*Volunteers are an important part of the TAPS family.  
We are grateful for the time they donate in support of our mission.  
Volunteers, we salute you!*

Volunteer (noun): 1. a person who chooses to join the military; 2. a person who does work without getting paid to do it. Although these two definitions from Merriam-Webster may not define every TAPS volunteer, they certainly define 2nd Lieutenant John Rhoten, as he serves our nation's Armed Forces and TAPS.

John, a native of Stafford, Virginia, enlisted in the U.S. Army in October of 2002. Since that time, he has deployed to Iraq twice and served in Afghanistan as well. Having served in many postings, it wasn't until he was stationed at Fort Myer with The Old Guard that he heard about TAPS. John first became involved as a military mentor during the 2011 Good Grief Camp.

"When I decided to volunteer, I felt that I was in a place to help others," said John. "However, like a lot of mentors, I wish I had volunteered sooner." Working with TAPS as a Good Grief Camp mentor has helped John in ways he never imagined. "As a service member you try to mask your own emotions and feelings, but volunteering with TAPS has helped me cope with my own grief, and I am eternally grateful for that."

John has had the opportunity to be paired with the same child during the past three years. "Spending time with my mentee and watching him grow as a young adult has probably been the best experience for me," said John of his favorite thing about volunteering. "I look forward to seeing him serve as a mentor with the younger age groups next year."



*Thank You,  
John*

Since his first TAPS event, John has committed himself to TAPS children for several reasons. "I continue to volunteer with TAPS because I feel that the children need to know that it is okay to have the feelings that they have, to reinforce that their loved one's service mattered, and that they will never be forgotten."

One of the best things about volunteering, according to John, is "seeing the kids make connections with each other. Some

of them come into the camp not knowing what to expect or what's going to happen." Seeing that, through the work they do with each other, they are able to share their own personal experiences, possibly even for the very first time, has been rewarding.

To date, John has been a Good Grief Camp Mentor at six separate seminars, including the 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 National Military Survivor Seminars, the 2012 Fort Hood Camp Out, and the 2014 Fort Hood Survivor Seminar.

But John's service to TAPS doesn't stop with being a mentor. He has also worked with the Run and Remember Team. In 2013, he ran the Dallas Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon and the Marine Corps Marathon. This year he ran the Arizona Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon, Phoenix Marathon, Oklahoma City Memorial Half Marathon, San Diego Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon, and the Marine Corps Marathon. He has raised more than \$12,000 for TAPS programs to date.

No matter where he is stationed, John remains committed to TAPS, ultimately adding to the success of the organization. We are truly fortunate to have someone of such stature as an advocate for TAPS and hope to have him around for years to come as he continues to serve. \*

TAPS welcomes new volunteers. Visit us at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) and click on Support TAPS or email us at [volunteer@taps.org](mailto:volunteer@taps.org).

# The Run and Remember Team Transitioning to Team TAPS for the New Year

It was the fall of 2000 when TAPS entered its first team in the Marine Corps Marathon. The team consisted of Lori Hunter and Marie Campbell, both surviving widows. Through the years, the team has grown by leaps and bounds, encompassing runners of every relationship, age, and experience. The team also has grown to cover many more events than the annual Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C. This past year, TAPS fielded more than 1,100 runners in dozens of races.

For many survivors, friends, military members, and donors, the TAPS Run and Remember Team has been a mainstay of meaningful involvement. Runners and walkers have engaged in races all across the United States (as well as in foreign countries) to raise funds and awareness for TAPS, honoring the loved ones who died while serving in the American Armed Forces.

Now as we enter our fifteenth year of teamhood, we are transitioning in a way that will allow more entries in more events. By changing our name from the Run and Remember Team to Team TAPS we are opening up opportunities to participate in unlimited types of events in addition to our running events.

Rather than focusing solely on running, the newly inaugurated Team TAPS will incorporate biking, walking, Ironman competitions, triathlons, swimming, tennis, and other competitive events that our survivors and friends would like to enter.

In the same way that running will expand into additional categories for Team TAPS, "remembering" our fallen will expand to incorporate the motto, "Celebrating the lives of America's fallen heroes."

When asked about the change, team director Marie Campbell said, "While we honor and pay tribute to our fallen heroes through these events, it is important that we remember and celebrate their lives and legacies."

We invite you to check online for events for the coming year. If your community sponsors an event you don't see listed as a Team TAPS event, you can still register and participate. TAPS will provide a fundraising web page, newsletters, chats, and recruiting tips to support your efforts. \*

.....  
To sign up or get involved, write to [teamtaps@taps.org](mailto:teamtaps@taps.org), call 800-959-TAPS, or visit [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) and click on Support TAPS, then Team TAPS. Let's get started!  
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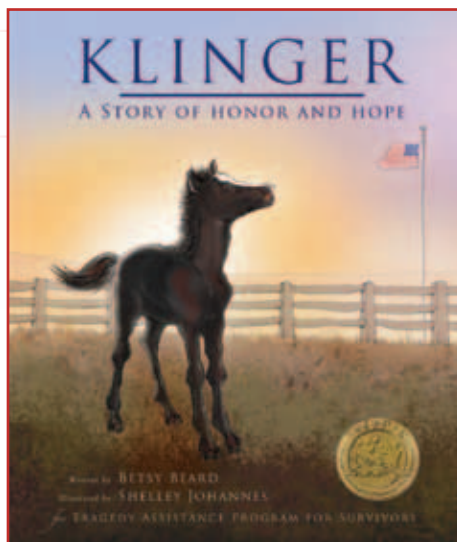


# Holiday Shopping from Home

At this time of year we need less stress, not more. So here's a suggestion on how to avoid the malls and traffic this holiday season: shop in the comfort of your own home while giving back to TAPS. The TAPS Online Store allows for an easy and stress-free holiday shopping experience. And all online purchases help TAPS continue the mission of supporting those who grieve.

## TAPS Online Store

The TAPS store offers items for everyone on your list. From Afghan bracelets and our award-winning children's book to TAPS logo travel mugs, aprons, and clothing, you will find plenty of ideas. Visit [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) and click on TAPS Online Store.



**Klinger book and plush horse** (sold separately): Klinger proudly serves with The Old Guard in Arlington, bearing our fallen heroes to their final resting places. His award-winning story will capture your heart.



**TAPS Logo CamelBak:** The .75L eddy™ bottle makes portable hydration simple. The spill-proof design, durable construction, and BPA-free materials make it an ideal bottle for work or play.



**Afghan Bracelets:** Women in Kabul create beauty from their native lapis lazuli stones. Literally "stone of heaven," lapis lazuli is a semi-precious stone prized for its intense blue color.



**TAPS Travel Mug:** The sixteen-ounce Tervis tumbler is great for hot or cold beverages, fits in most cup holders, and is dishwasher safe. Carry this reminder of your TAPS family wherever you go. Lid sold separately.



**Long-Sleeved Tee:** Unisex long-sleeved shirts with TAPS logo are available in gray and black in a variety of sizes.





**Standard Sweatshirt:** The TAPS standard hooded sweatshirt keeps you warm and cozy on those chilly days and nights. Available for adults and children in a variety of colors.



**Strength Sweatshirt:** The TAPS Strength sweatshirt has a special inspirational message on the back and comes in a variety of sizes. The same design also comes in a unisex t-shirt.



**Polo Shirt:** Men's and women's all-season polo shirts are available in navy or red. Both have the TAPS logo on the front.



**My Hero Shirt:** Honor your hero with the TAPS branch specific shirt in red. All branches of service are available.



**Sparkle TAPS Tees:** These shirts are available in two styles and are comfortable and stylish.

## TAPS Partner Items

From the TAPS Online Store, click on the TAPS Partners tab for special merchandise offers that benefit TAPS by donating a portion of their proceeds.

## Other Ways to Support TAPS

**iGive:** Sign up on [www.igive.com](http://www.igive.com) and select TAPS as your charity before shopping online. The iGive portal takes you to more than 1,200 participating online stores ranging from fashion and beauty to electronics and toys. There are no costs or hidden fees for this service.

**eBay:** Buying or selling on eBay? Log on to [givingworks.ebay.com](http://givingworks.ebay.com) and select Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors as your charity before making purchases. Sellers can also choose a percentage of each sale they wish to donate.

**Amazon:** Planning to shop at Amazon? Use [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com) and choose Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors as your charity of choice before making purchases. Amazon will donate 0.5% of every sale to TAPS.

**Washington Wizards:** For the sports fans on your list or for those times you need an extra boost of courage, visit [www.nba.com/wizards/courage](http://www.nba.com/wizards/courage) and purchase a Courage hat through the special campaign presented by Telos Corporation. All proceeds benefit TAPS.

**TAPS Direct Donation:** Consider making a memorial donation to TAPS in honor of your loved one this season. Visit [www.taps.org/donate](http://www.taps.org/donate) to contribute to the TAPS mission and support our programs and services. \*

*Photos by Reynaldo Leal Jr.*



# National Bereavement Study Enroll Now for Phase Two

Whether anticipated or unanticipated, the death of a service member forever changes the world of the surviving family members. Many of the characteristics of grieving a military death are unlike those of a civilian death, but until recently no one had studied the effect this has on the survivors.

The National Military Family Bereavement Study is the first nationwide scientific project exploring the impact of a service member's death, and is designed to understand the grief experience of the military survivor population and create a better understanding of families' needs. TAPS is one of the largest community partners in this study.



If you are interested in participating in the family phase (Phase 2) of the study, which involves face-to-face interviews or interviews by phone conducted three times over a two-year period, a first interview must be completed with one of the study's field researchers by February 28, 2015.

### Who can participate in this study?

Families of service members who have died by any circumstance of death on active duty status in the United States Armed Forces (Active, Guard, and Reserve Components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard) on or after September 11, 2001. The study includes parents, step-parents, adoptive, and legal guardians; siblings and step-siblings; spouses, ex-spouses, and adult partners; and children and step-children.

### Why should survivors participate?

The overall goal of the study is to best understand the grief experience of surviving military families. For caregivers to be most effective, they need to hear your voice. The study is an opportunity for survivors to help the surviving community and give back through landmark research.

### How can survivors participate?

★ Take the National Survivor Questionnaire. If you are an eligible family member, eighteen years and older, you can participate online at [www.militarysurvivorstudy.org](http://www.militarysurvivorstudy.org). A ten-dollar gift card is provided for completing the questionnaire.

★ Sign up to participate in a family interview. When two or more eligible family members take the questionnaire and are interested in the family interview, a member of the field research team will



interview each member three times over the course of two years. Children six years and older can participate with their assent and their parent's consent. A twenty-five-dollar gift card is provided for each interview.

★ Join a focus group. Children and siblings are needed to participate in the last of the focus groups. A twenty-five-dollar gift card is provided for each participant. For information on upcoming groups, visit the National Military Family Bereavement Study Facebook page.

The National Military Family Bereavement Study team wishes to extend its gratitude to all surviving family members who have participated in this historic study to date. More than two thousand individuals, representing nearly three hundred families, have enrolled. If you would like to participate, but have not yet done so, you can sign up and complete the study questionnaire online at the web address below. ★

For more information, visit [www.militarysurvivorstudy.org](http://www.militarysurvivorstudy.org) or contact Senior Field Researcher Dr. Jill Harrington LaMorie at [jill.lamorie.ctr@usuhs.edu](mailto:jill.lamorie.ctr@usuhs.edu).

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