

# TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

# TAPS®

Comfort and Support Since 1994 **MAGAZINE**

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



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

**TAPS**

Comfort and Support Since 1994 **MAGAZINE**

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

*In accordance with our goal of compassionate care, TAPS Magazine seeks articles that reflect the theme: Remember the love, Celebrate the life, Share the journey. We accept articles of interest and depth that are hopeful in tone, yet truthful in emotional content. Your experiences or expertise can help us bring hope and healing to other hurting hearts. To submit an article to TAPS Magazine, please write to [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).*

## **TAPS IS HERE FOR YOU**

If You Need to Talk, Call Us at  
**800.959.TAPS**  
or Visit Us at  
**WWW.TAPS.ORG**

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## **ABOUT TAPS**

### **WHO WE ARE**

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501 (c) 3 Veterans Service Organization providing compassionate care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, since 1994.

### **MISSION**

TAPS provides ongoing emotional help, hope, and healing to all who are grieving the death of a loved one in military service to America, regardless of relationship to the deceased, geography, or circumstance of death.

TAPS meets its mission by providing peer-based support, crisis care, casualty casework assistance, and grief and trauma resources.

## **TAPS**

**SUPPORTS** the bereaved survivor through a national network of trained volunteer Peer Mentors: those who have lost a loved one in the Armed Forces, and are now standing by to reach out and support others when a death occurs.

**EDUCATES** survivors, professionals, and members of the military about grief and the traumatic effects following the sudden death of a loved one. TAPS provides reading materials, the quarterly TAPS Magazine, training workshops, webinars, and an extensive website at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) with links to other helpful organizations.

**SPONSORS** regional Military Survivor Seminars & Good Grief Camps for Young Survivors in locations across America. These seminars give survivors the opportunity to learn, grow, share, and help each other heal.

**OPERATES** a national toll free help and information hotline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with support available from TAPS' Board of Advisors: leading experts in the field of grief and trauma. If you are hurting and need to talk to someone, call 800.959.TAPS (8277)

**HOSTS** the TAPS Online Community of survivors, providing secure chat rooms, a weekly message of encouragement, and general as well as relationship specific forums.

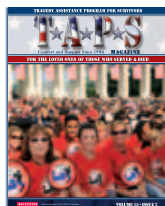


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**COVER PHOTO BY**  
Jackie Ross

TAPS National Seminar attendees at the Amphitheater in Arlington National Cemetery for the National Memorial Service on Memorial Day, 2009.



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# Letters To T★A★P★S



We want to know your thoughts, perspectives, and opinions on TAPS program and publications. Write and tell us what you think. Or send us ideas for future topics or submit your own article. Submission Guidelines can be found online at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org). Your family is waiting to hear from you! \*

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I found it interesting in the TAPS Magazine a few months ago where a brother had a memorial tattoo made for his brother. It was a wonderful article [A World of Hurt, by Chad Weikel, Volume 14, Issue 2] and because of it, my daughter joined an online sibling support group. The young man [who wrote] the article spoke of so many of the thoughts my children have.

~ Penny Young ~  
Surviving mother of  
SPC John J Young,  
Pooler, GA

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Our very first [TAPS] experience was very recent... it was exactly what we needed.

~ Mark and Irma McVicker ~  
Surviving parents of  
LCpl Daniel McVicker,  
Alliance, OH

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**editor @ taps.org**  
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I have received your survivor's packet and two back issues of TAPS magazine. I am thrilled with them. As I read them page by page, I thought to myself. If only someone had placed these in my hands the day of notification. If not then, at least the next day. It was only yesterday as I read one of them that I uncovered a golden jewel. Here is the sentence, and I shall not ever forget it. "There will come a time when I think of my loved one that the first thing I remember is that they lived and not that they died, and that will be a great day."

~ Karen Dingler ~  
Surviving mother of  
SPC Joshua P. Dingler,  
Hiram, GA

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I just received the latest volume of TAPS. I want to tell you how much I love receiving this magazine. I have enjoyed the articles and information that it contains. My son was killed 4/12/2007 in Baghdad, Iraq and receiving your magazine has been very helpful.

~ Pam Mow ~  
Surviving mother of  
CPL Cody A. Putman,  
Lafayette, IN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Thanks for mailing me out the three TAPS Magazine Issues. It's a privilege to become a member. You all are wonderful in what you do. We thank God for you and your dedication to all the military and their families. Anything I can do as a Chaplain or Army Ambassador - please let me know.

**God's Blessings,**  
~ Dr. John South ~  
Chaplain (Col) USA, Ret.

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Yesterday I received a second mailing of TAPS information and have placed it in a reception area for soldiers and families. Also we have shared your information, especially the article of Grief Camp For Kids. I work as a social work assistant at Ft. Drum - always looking for services and support for our soldiers and families. Your organization truly impacts persons coping with the traumatic loss of a loved one. Thank you again for your information and for being there to care!

**Abigail Brown, Ft. Drum, NY**

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*The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors is blessed to have friends who are generous in their support and untiring in their devotion. They come alongside us as partners in meeting the mission of comforting and supporting those who grieve. We are honored to call them Friends of TAPS, and are grateful for their assistance.*



**Lucy Reilly Fitch**

## Thank You to our friends at BAE Systems!

The strong support of leading corporate sponsor BAE Systems was felt throughout the 15th Annual TAPS National Military Survivors Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors. TAPS was honored with the presence of BAE Systems employees both as volunteers and speakers - among them President and CEO Walt Havenstein, who addressed our TAPS family in our opening session, and Lucy Reilly Fitch, Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications, who was able to spend several days with us. Approximately 20 others from the BAE Systems family worked tirelessly in the Good Grief Camp and behind the scenes at the Survivors Seminar, lending hearts and hands where needed.

Lucy became a familiar figure to those who attended, and was present from the opening ceremony on Friday until the TAPS Memorial Service on Sunday. She participated in Good Grief events and activities, including the introduction of special guest U.S. Air Force General Norton Schwartz at the Grand Banquet on Saturday, the Good Grief Camp balloon release early on Sunday, and our family Memorial Service later that day. Through her leadership, BAE Systems employees are volunteering for TAPS projects and events, including recent participation in the TAPS Annual Volunteer Card Signing and the National Seminar.

Lucy, who is the daughter, wife and mother of Navy sailors, recently talk-

ed about BAE Systems' involvement with TAPS and the commitment of its employees to those who serve.

"It is really a privilege for BAE Systems to support TAPS this year given all that the organization is doing for the families of our fallen men and women in uniform," she said. "I am fortunate to go to work every day with colleagues who work tirelessly to do what they can to ensure that our servicemen and women have the very best products and capabilities we have to offer. While we do all that we can to protect our men and women who go in harm's way, sometimes the best simply is not enough."

That's where TAPS steps in, she explained. "TAPS honors our courageous service members by offering unequalled and unconditional help, hope, and healing to the families." She says it is humbling to think about the personal choice made by those who serve - essentially "writing a blank check made payable to 'The United States of America' for an amount 'up to and including my life.'"

"There are many people that understand and value that families are dealing with the loss of a loved one who has given the last full measure of devotion in their selfless service to the nation," she added. "I can't tell you how it feels to have survivors tell me that members of the BAE Systems team who support events like the Good Grief Camp are their heroes. I am struck by their continued sense of

patriotism, even after losing a loved one in service to the country."

Lucy has led Corporate Communications at BAE Systems, Inc. since August 2008, and previously led the company's US teams for Mergers & Acquisitions and Strategy, contributing to BAE Systems' growth through the completion of 18 acquisitions. Before joining BAE Systems, she was the Director of Business Development and Strategic Planning for Lockheed Martin's Aeronautics sector. Her prior posts included Vice President of Business Development at ManTech Systems Solutions Corporation, and Manager of Strategic Analysis at Hughes Aircraft Corporation (now Raytheon Company). She was a business journalist for a decade, covering the Departments of Defense, Commerce and Energy, as well as Capitol Hill, during the Reagan, Bush and Clinton administrations. \*

*"I can't tell you the impact the weekend had on my colleagues and me. It is the least we can do for those who have experienced such profound loss in the service to our nation. We are here for you, and will continue to support you and TAPS in any way we can."*

- Lucy Reilly Fitch -





# A Breath of Summertime-Anytime

By Darcie Sims, Ph.D., CHT, CT, GMS



It's summer and the air is warm upon my face. The sunlight dances across the grass, casting tiny shadows of the dandelions that wave in the afternoon breeze. It's nice here, sitting on the step, letting my mind wander, not really thinking of anything much. It's been a long time since I was able to just sit and enjoy the gentle rhythms of a summer's day.

Do you remember summer? Summer, that wonderful reprieve from winter's despair, was the season of innocence. We ran through the meadows, without caring about tomorrow. We chased rainbows after storms and sang in the rain; chasing away whatever clouds appeared on our horizon. We picked berries and made lemonade and sugar cookies. Life was good and simple and gentle in the summertime.

Why isn't it now? Why now, does light hurt my eyes and the sun sear my soul?

*Find a summertime memory that brings feelings of warmth, safety, and pleasure.*

Why now, do I see the crabgrass and the weeds instead of making fairy wreaths of the dandelions? Why does the storm cloud come and stay and where did the rainbows go? Has my vision grown cloudy? Has grief permeated even the summertime place in my memory? Why can't I remember the joy, the laughter, the games of early evening and the recipe for popsicles? What happened to me? Did I forget the light because all I can remember is the darkness? Has grief stolen even the sunlight, leaving only shadows of sorrow? I didn't know it would hurt this much in summer.

I used to be able to imagine fairy castles and ice cream mountains, guarded by purple dragons and yellow birds. All I can envision now is the emptiness. Even when I close my eyes, all I can see is blackness. Will I forever be running away from pain and emptiness?

A storm gathers across the sky. The smell of rain comes on the wind and I know I must seek shelter, both from the rain and from the grief that washes across me, day after day. It cannot hurt this much forever! I cannot hide forever. I cannot keep running away. I want to find Summer again!

And so, I must find a way back to the joy. As I dash to the porch to seek safety from the rain, I know I must also find some way to embrace the pain of this grief in order to release it whenever

I am ready. Perhaps I can start by learning to breathe. When we are hurting or in a hurry or under great stress, we grab at the air, pulling it in as fast as we can. We swallow great gulps of air, inhaling and exhaling as quickly as possible. We never really quite fill our lungs because we are gasping at the air. We are almost desperate in our attempt to breathe.

But here in the slowness of a summer's rain, perhaps we can learn to grow gentle in our breathing and in our despair, as well. Breathing isn't a big step in the grief process, but it is the most important one! Without breathing, nothing else works. And since we are breathing, we might as well enjoy its healing capabilities.

So, as you sit on the step, or lie down in the grass, begin to become aware of your breathing. Notice how and when you take in air and how and when you release it. Do you grasp at the air, grabbing at the air, trying to fill your lungs to capacity? Or do you merely "sip" at the air, allowing small amounts to slip past your lips? Perhaps breathing deeply hurts in some way, causing muscle spasms or memories to flood across your mind...

Become aware of your breathing and try to orchestrate your breath. Bring air in through your nose, holding it for a count of 1-2-3 and then let it



escape past your lips. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. FEEL your breath and follow it as it flows through your body. Breathe IN through your nose, imagining the oxygen flowing through every cell in your body, bringing its healing energy to every corner of your self. Exhale through your lips, letting the used-up air rise all the way up from your toes; and send it out of your body, letting it escape through your mouth.

You can even add sounds to the breathing OUT, if you wish. Listen to your body and find the sounds that may be hiding somewhere within you. You can find those sounds and let them go as you release your breath. Perhaps you find a groan or some anger that needs expressing. Perhaps it is a song or laughter that bubbles up and out. Whatever the sounds, let them come, as you allow your breath to be released.

You may find tears coming as you practice this breathing technique. Let them come as well as any feelings that rise to your awareness. Healing begins when feelings are recognized, acknowledged, and released. As you continue to breathe IN through your nose and OUT through your mouth, you might wish to close your eyes and let your mind begin to drift. Grow quiet and find the rhythm of your body, breathing in a way that feels comfortable to you.

Perhaps you can imagine a warm light shining down on the top of your head. It is just like sunlight dancing across your forehead, warming your whole being. As you continue breathing, imagine that sunlight moving down your body, drifting slowly across each part of your body. Imagine the sunlight caressing the back of your neck and your shoulders, easing away the tension that we often carry there.

Imagine the sunlight flowing down your shoulders, your elbows, across your chest. As the warmth of this

summer sun washes across your body, you can feel the tension leaving. The cares of the winter drift down your legs and leave through your toes. You feel lighter, softer, calmer.

As you begin to feel more at peace, let your imagination create a "safe place" for you. Find a summertime memory that brings feelings of warmth, safety, and pleasure to you. You might find yourself on the beach, feeling, seeing, hearing the waves wash across the sand. You might be standing in a mountain meadow, surrounded with

*Make the commitment  
to grow quiet within  
and listen to the  
music of yourself.  
Take one small footstep  
each day. Make one  
small change each day.*

wild flowers, the sounds of a gentle mountain stream calling you to rest.

Whatever picture comes to you as you spend a few moments in reflective breathing, enjoy it completely. Smell the smells of your favorite place. Taste the tastes, hear the sounds of this magical moment. It is yours, deep within you, a place of safety and calmness.

You can find this QUIET WITHIN any time you need to, just by becoming aware of your breathing, always breathing in through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. As you become more experienced in this breathing technique, you will find you can create any scene you wish, creating any landscape you find comforting. You can create a summertime place anywhere, any time. You just have to breathe and imagine.

✧ Breathe in PEACE. Exhale TENSION. Let it flow out of you, imagining our summertime sun warming each part of your body.

✧ Breathe in JOY. Exhale SADNESS. Blow out the grief, if only for a single moment. Feel your heart becoming lighter, your pain growing less.

✧ Breathe in LOVE. Exhale GRIEF. Let the light of your loved one's life fill you with memories, not just of summertime, but of every time you laughed and sang and danced and dreamed and loved.

Make the commitment to grow quiet within and listen to the music of yourself. Take one small footstep each day. Make one small change each day. It only takes a moment to find the MAGIC WITHIN. So, here in the warmth of summertime, find the peace that is deep within you and let it bring comfort to yourself and others. Be gentle in your despair and trust the wisdom within.

Find a new wholeness for yourself this summer. Find the balance of heart and mind that allow the memories to heal rather than hurt. Come out of hiding in the summertime and let the breath of summer begin to heal the hurts. Breathe in love and find the memories and the magic of those who have loved us. LOVE is the magic that heals us all. ✧

### *About the Author*



**Darcie Sims** is a bereaved parent and child, long time friend and keynote speaker for TAPS, author, thanatologist, pastoral bereavement specialist, licensed psychotherapist, and president and co-founder of GRIEF, Inc. [www.griefinc.com](http://www.griefinc.com)

# Losing a Sibling in Adulthood

By Rayna Vaught Godfrey, PhD

*"We've lost Wes."*

I heard my father say this and then everything went silent in my head. I saw the tears streaming down his face, felt his and my mother's arms hold me as I started to crumple to the floor, knew my mouth opened as the screams burst forth, but everything was surreally quiet to me in those first few moments after I learned my 16-year-old brother and only sibling had died in a car accident a few hours earlier.

After that initial plunge into grief 15 years ago, I began to search for information about sibling loss and found very little, especially on adult sibling loss.

I felt extremely alone, not only because I was missing my brother, but because society didn't seem to even recognize my loss. How many times did I hear, "Oh, your brother died; how are your parents doing? How awful for them!" Yes, it was awful for them.

But it was awful for me as well and very few people seemed to notice this. Wes had been my best friend, my confidante, my strength to get through the tough times. Here I was, navigating the toughest time of my 20-year-old existence without him, in a society that expects that the pain of sibling loss is "neither intense nor of long duration" (Moss & Moss, 1986).

When I entered graduate school seven years later, I returned to my search for information with academic

earnestness, fueled by my continued relationship with my brother and a sense that I needed to do something about this missing information. I felt compelled to write my doctoral dissertation on this topic. This qualitative study (Godfrey, 2002) revealed the following important themes of the experience of losing a sibling in adulthood.

## Importance of Siblings

Contrary to popular Western beliefs, the sibling relationship does not dissipate when people leave the parental home. Siblings have the opportunity to be friends, and provide love and security from childhood into adulthood and old age. The sibling bond sustains distance, conflict, and family dynamics. Even those siblings who aren't as close can experience a mutual understanding, an enrichment of relationship, and a unique connection. Siblings are important in adulthood. They provide companionship and support, play a prominent role in the tasks of adult development, and constitute a significant part of one's sense of self and family. If not for death, they would be with us longer than anyone else on earth.

## Profound Loss

Bereaved siblings experience profound loss, even though this loss is often unrecognized by society. People miss the companionship, understanding, and support shared with their siblings. With the loss of such an enriching relationship, there is an absence of a specific level of understanding, a set of interactions, a resource of support. We miss our sibling's presence in everyday life and at important events where he or she would have been there to celebrate or cry with us. There is a sense of being robbed, of losing an important component of our sense of family. On a deeper



level, there is a part of ourselves missing after the death of a sibling. Such a death leaves a seemingly unfillable hole, both within us and within our families. This is magnified for those who lose their only sibling and no longer have someone who shares their histories, who can reminisce with them and can validate their family narratives. The pervasive grief of adult sibling bereavement is raw and intense initially, turning familiar and expected around three to five years after the death.

## Dealing with the Loss

Bereaved siblings are not passive bystanders, but actively deal with their losses. Some find expressing emotions helpful, including using therapy as a means to do so. Adult siblings often find it helpful to be able to "tell their stories" in such a way as to find meaning or make sense of the loss, or simply to share their siblings with others. Many times, bereaved siblings do not have this opportunity outside of therapy because the loss is not recognized. Adult siblings use a variety of ways to deal with their losses including distraction, gaining control, taking action, and self-soothing. Some rely on other people as a source of support, while other siblings need to grieve on their own. A significant part of dealing with the death of a sibling entails trying to make meaning of the loss.





## Making Meaning of the Loss

The process of meaning making begins with the details of the death or of the illness leading up to the death. Fact gathering, although helpful initially, is insufficient in the long run when information dwindles, is incomplete, or is even contradictory. Thus begins a search for meaning, for some sense, some reason; a way to restore order to the universe or accept that there is no order. Previous world assumptions have to be revised to include new knowledge about life and death gained from losing a sibling. This is no small task and brings with it an increase in anxiety and a more serious outlook on life, as well as an increased sense of vulnerability for both the surviving siblings and their loved ones.

People also experience personal growth and discover a greater appreciation for life and those around them. Relationships may change for the better and people may feel stronger for being able to survive such a loss. Rituals provide an opportunity to create meaning as well as to connect with the deceased sibling. Many people describe having a continued relationship or connection with their siblings after the death.

The impact of losing a sibling in adulthood is far-reaching and affects one's sense of self and relationships. As a result of the loss of a sibling, people change. Some may become more outgoing and risk-taking as they internalize those aspects of their sibling. Others may gain confidence in themselves as they realize they have survived such a penetrating loss and faced subsequent difficulties on their

own. There is a deeper appreciation for life and those around us, and an increase in compassion for others. To some extent, people may become more anxious and less trusting. Bereaved siblings are forced to confront the randomness of existence and a loss of control, as well as question world assumptions. The death of a sibling impacts who we are, what we hold dear, and how we relate to people. For better or for worse, we are never the same.

## Grief in the Context of Others

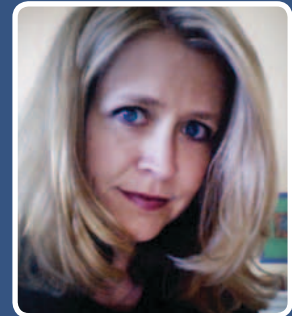
Although grief is a very individual experience, it exists in a social context and is influenced by those around us. Society often does not recognize the death of a sibling in adulthood as a significant loss and as such, many bereaved siblings feel ignored. The focus of concern falls to parents or to the sibling's family of procreation. Often, parents are not helpful in the process of sibling grief. They may be too consumed by their own grief to provide much in the way of consoling for the remaining children. However, as adults, siblings are often expected to assume a care-taking role with parents. Grieving in the context of others is a mixed bag. People are helpful when they allow bereaved siblings to grieve in their own ways and in their own time. They are not helpful when they offer platitudes and uncomfortable sympathy, when they don't listen, when they rush the griever or when they ignore the griever's experience. Talking with others is often helpful, however, as a way to keep memories alive, share the sibling with others, and make meaning of the loss.



## Conclusion

The experience of losing a sibling in adulthood is not something to be ignored. Siblings are important to us in adulthood. When a sibling dies, it is an incredible loss and there is something profoundly missing from our lives. Adult siblings grieve this loss and are impacted on many levels. This impact sets into motion a journey as people cope with the loss and try to make meaning of it. This journey includes both the painful and the positive. It is often solitary, but includes those around us who are both hurtful and helpful to us in our grieving. My own process of making meaning of Wes' death has taken me on a complex journey. This journey moved from a time when I couldn't find much to read about adult sibling loss to being able to write about adult sibling loss instead. It has also included connecting to my brother's very powerful presence along the way and being able to say, "I've found Wes." \*

## About the Author



**Rayna Vaught Godfrey, PhD**, is a licensed psychologist in private practice in Denver, CO. She teaches on an adjunct basis at the University of Denver and at the Metropolitan State College of Denver. Her e-mail address is [raynagodfrey@aol.com](mailto:raynagodfrey@aol.com).

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# Money Matters

## Dealing with Death, Dollars, & Sense

By Terri Thibodeaux



On August 5, 2000, I married USAF Technical Sergeant Christopher Sheaffer. We had been together for almost 3 years. Chris was a Freefall Instructor at the Yuma Proving Grounds in Arizona. I was an accountant in Phoenix. Chris had two daughters, Angie (14) and Sara (9) from a previous marriage. We had bought a fixer-upper house in Phoenix with land where we could keep our horses. I had been recently promoted. We were set. Life was picture perfect.

And then on September 12, just five weeks after our wedding, an Air Force Colonel and several of our friends showed up at my office dressed in uniform. "We regret to inform you..." are the words that still ring through my ears. I kept interrupting the Colonel saying, "No, I just talked to him last night. He was fine, he is fine. This can't be." But it was true.

I was escorted back to our home, which now seemed so empty and pointless. I felt as if I were standing all alone on the last remaining little piece of earth. I called my mom to tell her the news as I handed over my address book to one of our friends who would call the others. When I got off the phone, I just sat there. For the first time in my life, I had no idea what to do. I was helpless and lost.

The Colonel asked if there was anything I needed or something he could do. I said, "Bring Chris back?" He paused, apologized again for my loss, and told me I would be contacted by someone to help with funeral arrangements and discuss financial benefits.

Financial benefits? What financial benefit could there possibly be? And what did I care at that moment about finances. I had no idea what to do with the news I had just been given. And I could not stomach the idea that I would have to make funeral arrangements for my husband who had just turned 36 a month ago. We had barely finished making wedding arrangements. Now I was alone. How were financial benefits going to make this all better? NOTHING was going to make this go away.

The Casualty Affairs officer I met with informed me that Chris's pay would stop immediately, but I would receive benefits to help me financially. Her comment quickly pulled me back into reality. Oh my God! Chris had me mail the child support check to his ex-wife earlier in the week. Would there be enough money in the account to cover the check? How would the girls get any more child support? And how in the world was I going to pay the Harley payment, truck payment, trailer payment, and credit card debt from Chris's divorce? I made decent money, but I could not cover all of our bills on my salary alone.

With the officer's words, the last remaining little piece of earth I was standing on slipped out from under me. In that moment I went from "happily married" to 26 year old "widow." I went from being financially sound and fairly well off to wondering how I was going to pay my bills. There was no way. I was an accountant so I ran the numbers in my head. I knew I could not pay our bills without his income.

*"Many people were quick to tell me what I needed to do with the money."*

The Casualty Affairs officer gave me a check for \$6,000. Half of it was taxable income. She said the money was to help me with immediate expenses until the life insurance claim was processed. She then explained that I was the beneficiary of Chris's Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) valued at \$200,000. I had no idea what this insurance was. I had only been a military wife for five weeks. We did not even have time to get a joint checking account.

For a moment I was just numb. Then I felt sick. I was going to receive \$200,000 from the government in exchange for my husband's life. Blood money... that's what I called it. I did not want it. I wanted Chris. Even though I had been stressed over the past two days wondering how I was going to survive financially without Chris, this information did not provide any relief.

I talked to friends and family about the SGLI money. I just kept saying I didn't want the money. I had no idea that Chris paid a monthly premium for this insurance. I thought the government just paid this amount for the death of service members. I was ignorant. Friends reminded me that

Chris paid for this insurance and chose me as the beneficiary. He made the ultimate sacrifice and it was his way of taking care of me in his absence.

It still did not matter. What would this money do for me? Would it make me happy? All the money in the world was not going to change the loss or ease my pain. When the SGLI check came in the mail, it sat on the counter for days. I did not want it. I wanted Chris, not the money.

The Air Force assigned an officer to help me close Chris's personal and military affairs. She called to see if there was anything she could do. I had finally decided to look at my checkbook and pay bills. It was bad. I could afford to pay the Harley and truck payments but not the trailer or his credit card. I did not want to lose all of his things, but I couldn't pay all the bills. So the officer offered to call the debtors and see if they could defer payments for a while until I got things in order.

I realized I needed the SGLI money if I was going to keep everything. When I went to the bank to deposit the money, I was questioned by the teller as to how I came across this much money. I was insulted. With tears in my eyes and anger in my voice, I told her I had lost my husband. I suppose it isn't everyday a 26-year-old brings in a

check for \$200,000. I split the money between two banks so I would have up to \$100,000 covered by FDIC insurance. Beyond that, I had no clue what to do. I simply allowed the money to sit there.

*"The battle is hard  
and the road to a  
new life is long.  
Somehow we find  
the strength to  
keep moving."*

Many people were quick to tell me what I needed to do with the money. I should pay off the house, the truck, the Harley. What did they know? Had they ever received a sum of money like this? Did they know how I could start my life over?

I called my stepdad because he seemed to be good with money. He told me he had his money invested for years with a financial advisor. I did not realize he relied on someone else to handle his money for him. I told him about all the advice I was getting from friends and family. He recommended I call his advisor. It was the best thing I could have done.

I talked to his advisor and explained my situation. I told him I did not want the money but unfortunately needed some of it. I knew it was not a lot (although some people acted like I was rich) and I needed to make it last. I knew Chris would want me to set aside some for his daughters and I definitely needed some to help me readjust my lifestyle to survive on my income alone.

Now, I am a fully licensed financial advisor. How I got into this career does not matter nearly as much as why I did. The story I shared with you is as clear in my mind now as it was back then. The day I received the news was the worst day of my life. For that reason, I am grateful for the opportunity to help people prepare for tragedy should it occur, and help them through it when it does.





None of us thought this would happen to us... but it did. In hind-sight I offer the following advice to you from a personal and professional viewpoint:

»»» If you do not have a financial advisor, get one. You will need the expertise and advice to help you start a new life. Make sure you choose someone you can trust. It should be someone who listens to your concerns and needs. Having a professional managing your risk and helping you plan for financial security is priceless.

»»» Find a financial advisor who does financial planning. Anyone can give financial advice. You want someone who provides advice based on your situation. They need to understand all aspects of your financial situation before offering recommendations for investments and products.

»»» Make sure you are clear on the fees and charges upfront if you decided to use a financial advisor. Don't wait until after you have invested in their recommendations.

»»» Take your time. It's okay to let your money sit for a while. You have a lot to deal with. An advisor who offers solutions for investing your money is fine. However, if those solutions have short deadlines or the advisor seems pushy, you may want to reconsider who you are working with.

»»» Count on your family for emotional support but not financial advice. Everyone thinks they know what you should do with your new money. Paying off the house and other debt is not always the right thing to do. Every situation is different, and everyone has different goals and needs.

»»» Make sure you have the right amount of insurance to take care of your loved ones in your absence. The money will not ease the pain of loss but it

will help relieve the financial stress. I realize now how much easier things would have been if we had been prepared for this to happen to Chris or to me. You can never prepare emotionally for this loss, but having your finances in order and your wishes documented eliminates some of the chaos during this awful journey.

It has been more than eight years since Chris died. The battle is hard and the road to a new life is long. Somehow we find the strength to keep moving. Life will never be the same and the pain is always there, but hold on to the memories. Keep your head up and look for better times. I promise they will come.

I have a new life now. I have re-married... to an Army Master Sergeant. He has deployed several times. We were prepared and I made sure the other families deploying with him were, too. I share my story with you to help raise awareness on issues you may not have considered or may not want to think about. But you need to.

No one is guaranteed tomorrow. But if tomorrow never comes for me or my husband, I know that my family will be cared for. I learned from my own story. I have too much to protect and take care of, if the worst should happen again. \*



### About the Author



**Terri Thibodeaux**  
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Terri holds a BS in Accounting, has taught high school business courses, and in December 2007 became a fully licensed Financial Advisor. She is employed by Ameriprise Financial Services, Inc. Her husband, Gary, is currently deployed and she and their three children (Austin, Raigan, and Saige) live in Virginia anxiously awaiting his return.



# ☆☆☆ A Triangle of Stars ☆☆☆

By Janet A. Norwood

*A triangle of stars -  
pure white on field of blue -  
represents the gratitude, Son,  
our country feels for you.*

*Some may think it's only  
a bit of folded cloth.  
But, more than that, it's an emblem  
of Freedom's highest cost.*

*Just a bit of folded cloth?  
No - a symbol to behold.  
Our world is now forever changed  
Our blue star now is gold.*

*A triangle of stars -  
pure white on field of blue -  
On bended knee his friend gave to me  
with whispered words so true:*

*"A grateful nation weeps this day  
and parents' hearts are broken.  
A patriot fought - a hero died -  
This flag is just a token.*

*It represents the love he had  
for family and friends;  
the courage and the honor  
upon which Liberty depends."*

*A triangle of stars -  
pure white on field of blue -  
The sacrifice made by those  
who do what Patriots do.*

*How high the cost of Liberty.  
How richly we have paid -  
For upon the altar of Freedom  
our precious son was laid.*

*To give this gift to Country  
was not our choice to make.  
The choice was his and he thought  
it a risk he ought to take.*

*A triangle of stars -  
pure white on field of blue -  
Through pain and sorrow, pride is  
strong  
for what he had to do.*

*How overcome with awe I am  
that the little boy we raised  
grew up to be a hero  
with Valor highly praised.*

*As a child, I thought it meant  
that I had done my part,  
if every time the flag passed by,  
my hand was on my heart.*

*But now I'm grown and understand  
we might be asked for more.  
The cost of cherished Freedom  
could be someone we adore.*

*Inside this folded triangle  
are stripes of red and white.  
They're hidden now and can't be seen,  
but by faith, I know that's right.*

*Neither can our son be seen;  
Faith lets us know he's near  
and watching over us until  
we leave to join him there.*

*It has a place of honor -  
these folded stripes and stars -  
For pride in him goes deeper  
than his parents' heart-felt scars.*

*A triangle of stars -  
pure white on field of blue -  
represents the gratitude, Son,  
Our country feels for you. \**

**Written with Love and  
Respect for our son,  
Sgt. Byron W. Norwood,  
USMC, KIA Fallujah, Iraq  
November 13, 2004  
By his Mother,  
Janet Aston Norwood  
Flag Day - © 2005**

# Online & In Touch

By Ellen Andrews, Online Community Manager

The mission of TAPS is to reach out to all who are grieving the loss of a loved one in service to America. Because our survivors are spread throughout the country (and yes, even the world), TAPS uses all available resources in order to extend our caring hand of friendship, hope, and support to all.

One of these resources is our TAPS Online Community. In this age of technology, the website is often the first view of TAPS that survivors have, and it is the conduit for outreach not only to survivors, but also to volunteers, supporters, and friends across the country. It is a way for all of us to connect and share with fellow survivors, discover grief resources and information, learn about upcoming TAPS regional and national seminars, and find out about the volunteer opportunities and fundraising events that are vital for TAPS to continue its mission.



*“I want to thank you all so much for talking with me and making this night better. I am so happy that I can come here and talk to people that understand.”*

*~ Chat Room Participant*

## Chat Rooms

Each week, survivor chat rooms provide a safe and comfortable way for people to come together and share. We have general discussion chats, along with special topic and relationship focused chats. The chat rooms offer real-time conversations with others and help us realize we are not alone. Whether your grief is new, or you have been a part of the TAPS program for years, there is something for you in the chat room.

The chat room is a wonderful place to establish connections with other survivors. After you have “met” in the chat room, you can always be sure to find a familiar friend when you attend the regional and national seminars. It is also a wonderful way to keep in touch after you have attended a TAPS event. Having been surrounded at a

TAPS event by so many who understand what you are going through, you might feel an emotional letdown when you return home. The Online Community and the chat rooms help you keep those connections going strong. There are always caring hearts and a warm atmosphere awaiting you in our chat rooms. We invite you to attend!

The chat room format allows visitors to participate at their own comfort level. You can join in the conversation or just observe, whichever is more comfortable for you. You will find survivors that are near the same point of the grief process as yourself, and you will find those that have experienced grief in the past and are now joining in to be a source of support to those more newly bereaved. The chat is monitored only during scheduled sessions so be sure to check our schedule for dates and times.

## Message Boards

Message boards allow you to send and receive postings on a variety of topics ranging from sharing stories and challenges, to the special ways in which you honor your loved one. Some of our discussion topics are:

- ★ Special Dates and Anniversaries
- ★ Coping for the Long Term
- ★ Suicide
- ★ General Topics for Survivors
- ★ Relationships  
(Parents, Spouses, etc.)
- ★ Special Saturday Messages  
written by TAPS Peer Mentor and long time survivor, Carol Lane

You can subscribe to the message boards so that postings come directly to your e-mail inbox. Tailor your subscription to fit your needs; you may subscribe to all topics or just the ones in which you hold an interest and wish to participate. When you visit the message board site, simply click on the envelope icon in order to subscribe!

## Peer Group Sites

While our general chats and message boards provide a wonderful way to connect with others, there are times when you feel the need to talk with those with whom you may find a deeper, more personal connection and shared experience - those in your particular peer group.

TAPS provides Peer Group sites, giving another avenue for connecting with others. Peer groups, supported through the Yahoo network, are sites requiring membership approval so that we can ensure a safe and comfortable environment in which to share. You can post messages, share photos, and communicate with others in the group.



Messages are posted to the site and sent by email to all group members. Peer Group sites are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can choose your level of participation: either replying to postings, making postings yourself, or simply viewing the postings of others. Our current peer group sites include:

- ★ Parents
- ★ Siblings
- ★ Fiancées and Significant Others
- ★ Contractors
- ★ Battle Buddies (New!)

### Blogs

Blogs are a way in which we can distribute information about TAPS, upcoming events, and general information concerning the latest in grief and trauma. You may also subscribe to a blog in order to receive any postings from others that may respond to that particular story about TAPS.



### Regional and National Seminars

Event calendars and registration information for all of the TAPS Regional Seminars and Good Grief Camps for Young Survivors are found at our web home. You can also learn about TAPS Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp held Memorial Day weekend in our Nation's Capitol. Locations, dates, and agendas can be found at our website, providing additional opportunities to connect with others, and find hope and healing.

### Professional Education and Training

The TAPS website is the portal for information and registration for our Professional Education program. TAPS provides webinars for professionals and those working with grief and trauma survivors to share the latest news and information. Whether you are a mental health professional, caregiver, family support, medical professional, or military chaplain, these webinars give vital and up to the minute information for helping those who are grieving the death of a loved one in service to America.

The TAPS website also hosts the online training portion for our Peer Mentor Training Course. If you are at least one year beyond the death of your loved one, and would be willing to reach out to others more newly bereaved, find out more about our Peer Mentor Program online. By volunteering to become a Peer Mentor, you will provide companionship to newly bereaved individuals yearning to find

others who understand. Peer Mentor candidates complete the online Peer Mentor Training Course before attending the classroom training.

There is a wealth of information and support on our website. Whatever your comfort level with technology and interaction with others, there is something for you. We invite you to visit our site to learn more. Discover the Support! Share with Others! Do you know others who are grieving the loss of a loved one? We encourage you to pass along our website home and all its available resources. Spread the word! Share the comfort! \*



**All of the programs listed above can be found at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org). Click on the Online Community tab. Our door is always open, our hearts are always open. We are here for you!**



### About the Author

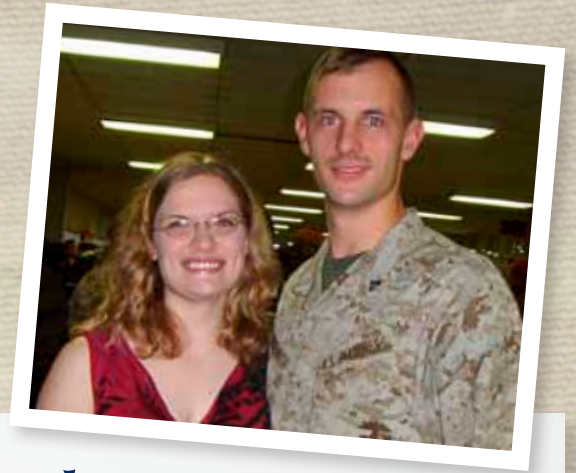


**Ellen Andrews** is the surviving fiancée of Navy Lieutenant David J. Huber, who died in an air accident shortly before their wedding in 1995.

# Almost a Daughter-in-Law

By Rachael Lukasiewicz

Although Rachael and her almost-mother-in-law enjoy a good relationship, they know that others have not been able to work through some of the relationship issues caused by sudden traumatic death. It is in the interest of helping others find a way to become more comfortable sharing the memories of their loved ones, that she wrote this letter. Although it is addressed to a Gold Star Mom, it could just as easily apply to other family members and society. It is a compilation of the thoughts of many strong women that have lost the men they loved, including some shared via the online TAPS fiancée forum.



## *To the Mother-in-Law I never quite had,*

*Please realize that I love your son... and I know you do as well. There was nothing fair or normal about him passing before you. Neither is there anything fair or normal about the man I love being gone, just when our lives together were starting. I realize that your grief is very profound, and there is nothing that I can do to make it better. But realize, also, that my grief, while different, is no more or less life-altering.*

*Yes, you may have known your son longer. But that makes the loss of him no better or worse, simply different. He and I were starting our lives together. We had plans and dreams and hopes. None of those are now possible. We lost not just what we had, but also our future. Time alone is not an indication of the depth of love... or the depth of loss.*

*I feel like a widow without ever having been a wife. While I understand and agree that you are officially recognized, sometimes it hurts not to be included simply because I didn't share his last name yet. It hurts when people ask, "How is his family?" It would be nice if they asked me, "How are ALL of you doing?" instead. I hurt too. Please signal your acceptance of the special relationship that we held by including me. Others will follow your lead.*

*When you are given certificates, commendations, and letters that your son earned, please realize that something as simple as a copy would mean the world to me. I'm proud of him too. I will do the same and share with you. The same thing applies to any ceremonies or awards honoring our beloved. Please, let me know. I'd like to be present and stand tall in his absence as well. Don't assume I know about these events. My unofficial status means I don't always get informed.*

*Please understand that if you tell me that you are going to include me, or ensure that something is given to me, and then you don't follow through, I am going to remember. And I'm going to be hurt. It isn't necessarily the loss of the physical item, or promised action that hurts, but what it represents.*

*Please don't ever tell me that I am young and will move on - as if that makes the loss any less significant - or tell me that I'm going to replace the man I love. I may one day move forward, sooner or later, but your son, my love, will forever be in my heart. I can't replace my fiancé, any more than you can replace your son. Please don't expect or imply that I can. If I do decide at some point, to date again,*

*let that be my decision. Don't place artificial timelines. I may move slower or faster than you are ready for. Don't be afraid to let me know your opinion, but realize it is my choice.*

*Please understand it is hard for me, and I'm scared too... I've already lost my heart once. And I'm trying to live the life that my beloved would want me to. He'd be mad if I didn't enjoy the freedom that he so believed in protecting.*

*Please be accepting, and know that no matter what happens, I can NEVER replace your son, or the role he played, in my life. Please realize that if someone else comes into my life it's because your son would want that for me. I'm sure he's helping from Heaven to guide me to that person. Even if I eventually start a life with someone else, I will forever love the man I lost, as well.*

*When your son, my love, was killed, my heart broke. His death left very deep cracks in my heart. Someday if I meet someone else, he can help to fill in those cracks, but those cracks are permanent, and will always remain.*

*I know that you don't mean to hurt me, and you have undergone a very significant loss, and if I unintentionally hurt you, then I apologize. If neither one*



of us realizes the pain we've inflicted on each other, then we must both try to understand and be accepting, and realize that we're both suffering. This wasn't the future that any of us planned. But it is the one we've been given. We're going to have rough times, and possibly misunderstandings, but please remember, none of us are perfect, and we are each an important link to the man we've lost. As long as those of us that loved him remember, his legacy remains... a part of him lives on through us.

Grief can take on various behaviors. If one day I don't want to get out of bed, please be accepting, but also encourage me to slowly take the next step forward... and I'll do the same for you. If I struggle with expressing my grief, please don't judge me, because society often doesn't give me the same legitimacy to grieve simply because I'm younger and not "official." As the fiancée of someone in the military, I feel as if I'm expected to be strong and not show emotion—after all, strong men pick the strongest women to be with. If I don't show my grief, it's not that I've forgotten... believe me, I haven't forgotten. Although your peers may be accepting of your loss and grief, I struggle because others my age can't comprehend such devastation. I aged so many years past my actual age the moment I heard the news that a man we both loved is gone from this world. I have lost not only the man I love, but also our future, and many of "our friends" at the same time... it's quite a lot to deal with at once.

Please realize, that no matter where I go in life you will forever be my family, and I hope I will always be yours, for that is what my love, your son, wanted from all of us. Remember, he chose me, out of all the wonderful and strong women in this world. You raised your son to recognize a partner, and he found me. Respect his choice, as I respect that the relationship between a mother and son will always be strong.

Neither one of us knew him better. We each knew different aspects of the same wonderful person. Neither one of us has a monopoly on knowing him. What matters is that he loved both of us... dearly.

Please know that much like you will always be his mother... so will I forever be his fiancée. Death doesn't change that. It's just a physical location... not the place he holds in my heart. \*

*Your son, my love...  
fallen but never forgotten...  
always in our hearts.*

*Love,*

*Your Almost  
Daughter-in-Law*

*Rachael is the proud surviving  
fiancée of Cpl Mike Lindemuth, USMC.*

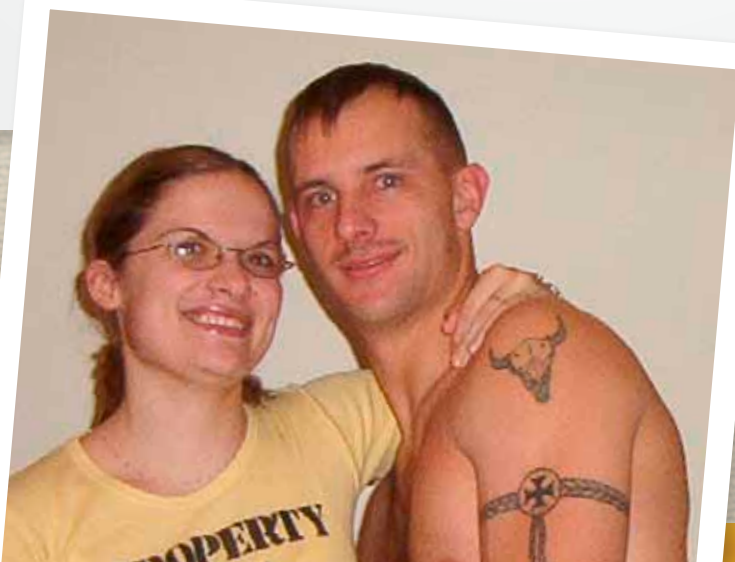
*Mike wrote an email regarding his unit's first loss, almost two weeks before he himself was killed:*

*"That was the strange part; you don't drop everything and go home when people die or get hurt. You still have your mission, and you can't run away and give the enemy the chance to do it again."*

*Cpl Mike Lindemuth, USMC*

*Rachael adds,*

*"We all still have a mission...  
our mission is to LIVE..."*





# Suicide: The Aftermath

By Madeline Lambrecht, EdD, FT

The latest reports for 2009 show an increasing number of suicides in all branches of the military with the largest increase in the Army. Figures from 2008 show the military suicide rate exceeding the civilian suicide rate for the first time.

## >>> Suicide Survivors

Suicide survivors are spouses, children, parents, siblings, grandparents, military buddies, friends - all who had a relationship with the individual who died. The American Association of Suicidology ([www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)) estimates that for every suicide there are six survivors. This is a conservative estimate, especially for military service members and their families. Given the mission of protecting our country, often in dangerous areas of the world, bonds among service members form quickly. Thus, when a suicide occurs, the survivor numbers increase exponentially.

At the same time, spouses and children are developing new relationships, while adjusting to new surroundings and circumstances such as recurrent deployments. Death impacts all of these relationships as well as those back home.

## >>> Survivor Responses

Grief following a suicide is complex and multidimensional with physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual components. Survivors often feel overwhelmed by the sudden death and experience a sense of disbelief or unreality. "How could this be happening?" Suicide evokes feelings of

abandonment and rejection. "Why wasn't I enough to keep him alive?" Other commonly reported feelings are shame, guilt, anger, and rage. Feelings of guilt can relate to issues of preventability (usually not realistic) and also to what is termed survivor guilt. "Why am I still here?" For those who express anger, it can be especially frightening when it continues to the point of rage. In these instances, professional intervention may be needed. Although we like to think of society as enlightened, a stigma still surrounds suicide - not to the degree of years past, but strong enough for many to remain silent when help is needed most.

After a suicide, one of the first persons to be called is the chaplain. The survivor's response to spiritual support may be positive or negative but must be respected. Some individuals who drew strength and comfort from their spiritual belief system may temporarily or permanently reject it after the suicide.

Survivors begin their search for the "why," believing that the answer will relieve their pain. Telling the story over and over helps them to process the unthinkable. Some may experience a sense of extreme vulnerability, perhaps to the point of wondering if suicide could be an answer to their own pain. While not unexpected, these feelings must be explored to assure the individual's safety. If there have been repeated attempts, the survivors may feel relief that it is over but also experience guilt for this very human

feeling. In all cases, there is unfinished business. There was not opportunity to say goodbye or address unsettled issues. It is important to recognize that there are ways to help survivors say a belated goodbye or whatever else is needed to bring such issues to an end point.

Recognizing that each person's grief is unique and that the relationship shared with the deceased is unique also, it's inevitable that no two grief journeys are the same. This may cause difficulties among survivors as each follows a different path. Support groups are often helpful in providing different perspectives as individuals move through the grief experience.

*NOTE: No mention has been made of clinical depression or a myriad of other responses due to space constraints. Please read the literature for a full description of responses to suicide.*

## >>> Disenfranchised Grief

By virtue of the type of death - suicide - the survivors may experience disenfranchised grief. According to Dr. Kenneth Doka, researcher and author, the survivors are not accorded a "right to grieve" because the grief is not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly observed. As noted previously, suicide still carries a stigma thus disenfranchising the grief of the survivors. There is often silence or an unspoken edict not to mention the word "suicide" or talk about the circumstances. Death-related services are frequently kept private or not held at all.

Individuals respond to death differently and this too can lead to lack of support. In *Men don't cry... women do: Transcending gender stereotypes of grief*, (2000) Dr. Terry Martin and Dr. Ken Doka identified three patterns of responding to loss: intuitive, instrumental, and blended. The intuitive griever exhibits feelings with a high level of emotional intensity and less use of repressive coping as a defense. She's more likely to display her feelings openly and seek support from others. The instrumental griever exhibits a problem-solving, cognitive approach with a high degree of repressive coping and low levels of emotional intensity. He's the person who is busy making arrangements while cognitively trying to find a reason for the death. By the definitions and examples, you might assume we're speaking of gender-based response patterns - female as an intuitive griever, male as an instrumental griever. However, Doka (p. 2) states, "Clearly, patterns are influenced by gender but not determined by it."

Today we are seeing an increase in women exhibiting instrumental responses and men exhibiting intuitive responses. Many exhibit a blended pattern of responses. In some instances, an individual's response pattern can lead to disenfranchisement of his grief. The instrumental griever, by virtue of his outward response, may receive little support in the immediate aftermath of death. However, one who is very emotionally distraught in the days and weeks after the suicide may receive much support. In each scenario, the individual's grief response pattern has the potential to disenfranchise his/her grief. The instrumental griever may not have received support immediately after the death but may have appreciated recognition of her loss via words or deeds. The intuitive griever may not receive the support needed 6-8 months later because of her strong need for support early. Ideally, support, at what-

ever level is appropriate, should be available on a continuing basis as long as needed.

### >>> **Support for Suicide Survivors**

Given all the different circumstances and the different response patterns, how can we support suicide survivors? First and foremost, we can break the silence and speak openly about suicide. As a survivor, I can speak candidly in acknowledging the relief felt by myself when I am honest in answering questions from others about my oldest son's suicide. As a mental health professional and a death educator, I had colleagues who provided much support, but I still had to slowly find my way back to a "different" new life. My other son, who was stationed on a cutter with the Coast Guard at that time, shared with me the companionship he felt in being in the company of the fellow Coastie sent home with him for the week following the suicide. Yet he also recalls the silence of nights topside on the boat as he dealt with his grief alone.

Recent reports of more openness in the military in speaking about suicide, both prevention and postvention, are encouraging. At Fort Carson, Major General Mark Graham, who lost one son to suicide while a ROTC cadet in college and a second one in the line of duty in Iraq, has initiated new ideas for both suicide prevention and postvention. For example, all soldiers from the base receive full military funerals and memorial services, regardless of whether they died in battle or by suicide. This speaks to the grief of all affected by the death.

Clearly there are many support strategies that can help suicide survivors and these include the following: suicide support groups; books and other information about grief following a suicide; rituals, such as a candle lighting on a deceased's birthday; a memorial such as a care package sent to a service

member on a special day each year; participation in events such as Out of the Darkness Walks and the annual National Survivors of Suicide Day Program sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention; online blogs and memorials; and professional counseling if needed.

TAPS provides additional resources including the annual National Military Survivors Seminar and Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors as well as regional seminars and local Care Groups.

Many individuals find exercise, music, and other diversionary activities helpful during the grief journey. Most important of all is the time spent one-on-one with the survivors. The gift of presence, with or without words, conveys genuine caring and concern for those whose lives are forever changed. Don't allow your discomfort to prevent you from reaching out to those in need.

In summary, life will never be exactly the same again for suicide survivors. However, "different," given time, can be acceptable and will hopefully become a "good" life. \*

### *About the Author*



**Dr. Madeline Lambrecht**, herself a suicide survivor, has been an educator, counselor, and consultant on death-related issues for more than 30 years. She is a Professor and Director of the Division of Special Programs, College of Health Sciences, at the University of Delaware and is a past president of the Association for Death Education and Counseling. Dr. Lambrecht is certified as a Fellow in Thanatology.



# Appropriate Expectations You Can Have For Yourself in Grief

By Therese A. Rando, Ph.D., BCETS, BCBT

*Reprinted with permission from How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies by Dr. Therese A. Rando (Bantam Books, 1991).*

Your grief will take longer than most people think.

Your grief will take more energy than you would have ever imagined.

Your grief will involve many changes and be continually developing.

Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life: psychological, social, and physical.

Your grief will depend upon how you perceive the loss.

You will grieve for many things both symbolic and tangible, not just the death alone.

You will grieve for what you have lost already and for what you have lost for the future.

Your grief will entail mourning not only for the actual person you lost but also for all of the hopes, dreams,

and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person, and for the needs that will go unmet because of the death.

Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions, not solely those that are generally thought of as grief, such as depression and sadness.

The loss will resurrect old issues, feelings, and unresolved conflicts from the past.

You will have some identity confusion as a result of this major loss and the fact that you are experiencing reactions that may be quite different.

You may have a combination of anger and depression, such as irritability, frustration, annoyance, or intolerance.

You may feel some anger and guilt, or at least some manifestation of these emotions.

You may have a lack of self concern.

You may experience grief spasms, acute upsurges of grief that occur suddenly with no warning.

You will have trouble thinking (memory, organization, and intellectual processing) and making decisions.

You may feel like you are going crazy.

You may be obsessed with the death and preoccupied with the deceased.

You may begin a search for meaning and may question your religion and/or philosophy of life.

You may find yourself acting socially in ways that are different from before.

You may find yourself having a number of physical reactions.

You may find that there are certain dates, events, and stimuli that bring upsurges in grief.

Society will have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you.

Certain experiences later in life may resurrect intense grief for you temporarily. \*

## About the Author



**Dr. Rando** is a clinical psychologist and Clinical Director of The Institute for the Study and Treatment of Loss, which specializes in loss and grief as well as traumatic stress. Since 1970, she has consulted, conducted research, provided therapy, written, and lectured internationally in areas related to loss, grief, illness, dying, and trauma. Dr. Rando has published 70 works pertaining to the clinical aspects of thanatology. Currently, she is completing a book for the general public on coping with sudden traumatic death. **For more information, visit [www.thereserando.com](http://www.thereserando.com).**



# Surviving the Death of a Sibling

Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies

By T.J. Wray ☆ Reviewed By Beth Anderson

*"We brothers and sisters were so happy at home... Who could have then believed that life would ever become so torn asunder?"*

*~Dag Hammarskjold*

That is one of many quotes from "Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies" by T. J. Wray. This book saved me in those first weeks after my little brother, Sgt. Phillip Anderson, was killed in Balad Ruz, Iraq. While reading the book, I was amazed at how the author's feelings following the death of her brother mirrored my own. The death of a sibling is one of life's greatest and often unrecognized losses.

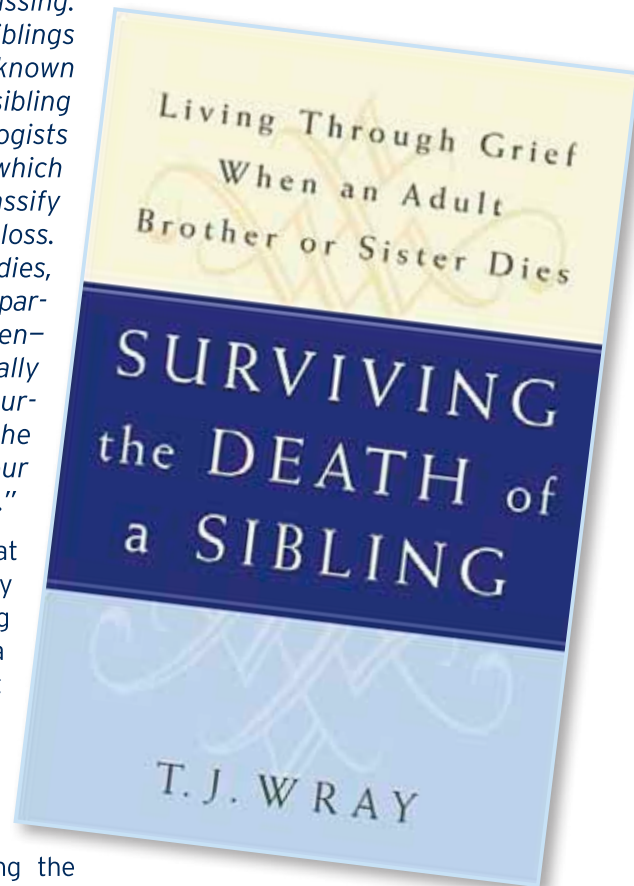
Although nothing can take away the sorrow and the sense of unfairness that we feel when our brother or sister dies, T.J. Wray's words help to convey the sense that we are not alone in our grief journey. As we also learn through TAPS, comfort comes from knowing that, as surviving siblings, we are forever connected. I was reassured by reading the experiences of other surviving siblings whose stories are so beautifully compiled in this book.

Dr. Wray writes, "Although the subjects of death, dying, and grief are more widely discussed now than in years past, the subject of adult sibling grief has been largely ignored by the grief support community, leaving surviving adult siblings to endure their grief in silence... Our society fails to recognize the depth of love we feel for our brothers and sisters and the

consequent grief felt at their passing. Aside from our parents, our siblings are the only people who have known us for our entire life. Adult sibling bereavement is what psychologists call a disenfranchised loss, which means that society fails to classify our mourning as a legitimate loss. After all, when an adult sibling dies, he or she often leaves behind parents, a spouse, and even children—all of whom suffer a more socially recognized type of loss—while surviving adult siblings stand in the shadows, often feeling as if our grief is somehow unwarranted."

Each chapter ends with a "What Helps" section containing many practical suggestions for coping with grief. The suggestions are a great tool to share with a support person in your life, like a spouse, partner, or best friend. There is also an excellent resource list at the end of the book.

In addition to recommending the book to other bereaved siblings, I also immediately asked my spouse to read it. It can definitely help a great deal to give our spouses or partners something that they can learn from and use as a resource. In most cases, they have no idea what we're going through and can definitely benefit from direction in how to handle the situation with the amount of compassion and sensitivity that is needed. When handing over the book, I said, "Everything written in this book is exactly what I'm feeling now and will be feeling for a long time. Please refer to it often." \*



*In T.J. Wray's book, Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies, the unique bereavement of adult siblings emerges from the shadows.*





# Eating to Live or Living to Eat?

## *A Personal Response to Grief*

By Victoria H. Hawk, MPH, RD, LDN

*"How can I eat at a time like this?"*

*"It all just tastes like cardboard..."*

*"It seems like all I want to do is eat."*

*"I still don't have the energy to even plan a meal, let alone cook it."*

Throughout our lives different circumstances will affect our ability to eat well. One of the first things we notice about grieving is that it affects our relationship to food. And since we all grieve differently, there is no one-size-fits-all grief response to eating. The only constant is that like so many other areas of our lives, it changed quickly and drastically when we received that knock on the door. The intense emotional response to grief presents challenges to eating well. We may lose our desire to eat entirely, or seek comfort from food and eat more than ever. Whatever the

case may be, the grieving process provokes a stress response in the body that can put our health at risk.

Eating a variety of foods is essential to life. In other words, we need to eat to live. Our bodies cannot manufacture all the substances we need and therefore we must consume foods to produce energy and to provide the building blocks necessary to sustain life. Eating foods with a range of nutrients such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and healthy fats will provide our bodies with the materials needed to keep our systems functioning well.

We all know this, but our response to grief may make it difficult to eat or easy to overeat, difficult to plan meals or too focused on tasks like cooking. Often we choose foods which have little or no nutritional value, perhaps for comfort, or simply because they are available. During times of stress, it is helpful to adopt a routine pattern for meals, exercise, and sleep. Eating consistently will affect mood, energy level, and how clearly we think.

Here are some things to consider as you navigate your own individual grief journey.

### Choosing foods that can improve your mood

Some foods have a physiological response in the body and may improve your mood. Carbohydrates serve as the main source of energy for your body and the preferred fuel for your brain. Eating foods containing carbohydrates may improve your energy level and increase the amount of serotonin in the

brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that has been shown to boost mood and improve sleep. However, not all carbohydrates are created equal and thus it is preferable to choose whole foods rather than refined or highly processed carbohydrates. The carbohydrates in whole foods are absorbed slowly, causing gradual increase in serotonin levels, and promoting a stable blood sugar level. Examples of whole foods that supply carbohydrates include fruits, starchy vegetables, whole wheat, whole oats, popcorn, beans, and brown rice.

Caffeine helps alertness chemicals in your brain do their job. Consuming moderate amounts of caffeine (20-200mg per day) may help you feel more alert and improve your mood, concentration, and reaction time. But moderation is necessary, so be careful how much you drink: too much caffeine can cause increased anxiety, nervousness, and difficulty sleeping. You may need to limit caffeinated beverages to the morning hours. Sources of caffeine include coffee, tea, energy drinks and many sodas, as well as some candy, chewing gum and coffee flavored foods. The amount of caffeine contained in different products can vary widely, so be sure to check the package label.

### Limiting or avoiding foods that may depress your mood

You may be familiar with the expressions "drowning your sorrows", "numbing the pain" or "drinking to forget" as they relate to using alcoholic beverages to cope with stressful situations. Although it may initially feel like a stimulant and mood enhancer, alcohol





is a depressant and may substantially decrease the body's ability to extract nutrients from the food you eat, and make you feel worse the next day. Therefore, consider limiting or avoiding consumption of alcoholic beverages. If you are using alcohol as a sleep aid, think about speaking with your doctor about safer alternatives.

### Eating too little

For some people a decrease in intake over a few days may not present any serious problems, but if your intake has decreased significantly and lasts more than a week, you may be at nutritional risk. In addition to the emotional stress response to grief, the decreased intake will invoke a stress response in your body that can negatively impact your health. After a few days of not eating enough, you will likely notice a decrease in your energy level and ability to think clearly, increased irritability and possibly dehydration. If your intake remains inadequate over a longer period time it may weaken your immune system, increase your risk for several chronic diseases, and result in unplanned weight loss.

In situations when your intake of food and liquids has decreased you can monitor your hydration status by noticing increased thirst, headache, changes in color or volume of urine, and increased fatigue. If you notice these changes you may need to drink more liquids. Suggestions to increase your fluid intake include keeping fluids available throughout the day, drinking liquids with meals, and choosing foods that have high water content such as clear soups, Jell-O, fruit, vegetables, and popsicles. Consider keeping a bottle of water with you during the day and aim to refill it often.

Over time, eating too little will result in unplanned weight loss. Some strategies to promote weight maintenance include consuming foods that are rich in calories and nutrients. Small quantities of these foods contain concen-

trated amounts of both calories and nutritious substances, so eating a little goes a long way. Choosing these foods can be helpful when you do not have much of an appetite and are eating less food at meals and snacks. Some calorie and nutrient rich foods include commercial liquid meal replacement shakes (e.g. Instant Breakfast, Ensure), peanut butter, cheese, and using whole milk instead of water for preparation of soups, puddings or smoothies. If it is too difficult to eat 3 regular meals, consider small, frequent meals (4-6 meals) during the day. Have nourishing foods available for snacking rather than candy or chips. These could include dried fruit, nuts, healthy snack bars, and pudding or yogurt. Keep your favorite foods on hand so that they are readily available when you are ready for meals or snacks. If after several weeks you are unable to maintain your weight, consider talking with your doctor.

### Eating too much

You may have discovered that you could not eat in the immediate aftermath of the death, but that with time you are reaching early and often for comfort foods to take your mind off your sadness or loss. If you are gaining weight because of the grieving process, try to identify activities other than eating that can bring comfort: listening to music, taking a walk, or writing in a journal are a few ideas.

When you do reach for food, it is helpful to have healthy, lower calorie food items available for snacking. Try stocking your kitchen with healthy foods such as Low fat microwave popcorn, non-fat yogurt, fresh fruits, sugar free jell-o or popsicles, and skim milk. Starting your day with a healthy breakfast of whole foods and proteins may help suppress your hunger and control your intake throughout the rest of the day. If you have questions or concerns about your weight gain, speak with your doctor or consult a registered dietitian.



### Preparing for the difficult days

Take into account that you will have good days and bad days during your grief journey. Planning ahead for healthy, appetizing meals on the bad days is essential. Consider the following suggestions:

»»» Have a supply of shelf-stable convenience foods on hand - items that are ready to eat with minimal preparation such as soups, frozen meals, and meal replacement shakes.

»»» Buy foods that are quick and easy to prepare - bagged pre-washed vegetables, frozen vegetables, packages of pre-cooked brown rice, pre-cooked grilled chicken breasts, canned tuna, eggs, canned beans, chicken broth, and whole grain pasta.

»»» Cook larger quantities of foods on good days and store some in the refrigerator or freezer for days when you are not able to cook.

»»» Freeze foods in small portions that are easy to re-heat in the microwave oven.

As you grieve the loss of a loved one, remember the importance of taking care of yourself for your own health and for the sake of others who may be depending on you now and in the future. Be kind to yourself. Eating healthy foods and staying hydrated are important elements of your recovery, and will help to prepare you for taking steps toward better times in the days and months ahead. \*

.....  
**Victoria is a Research Dietitian  
 living and working in Chapel Hill, NC.**



# Gold Star Lapel Button and Next of Kin Lapel Button

Much confusion surrounds the significance of the lapel pins given to surviving family members shortly after the interment of their loved one who died while serving honorably in the Armed Forces. Although there may be differences in presentation between the branches of service, there is only one law that governs the procurement, awarding, and wearing of the pins. Each of the two lapel pins have been authorized by Act of Congress. The legal

and military distinctions between the two are based on the place, time, and circumstances of the death, as well as the survivor's relationship to the deceased. For either pin, eligible family members include: widow, widower, mother, father, stepparent, parent through adoption, foster parent in loco parentis, son, daughter, stepchild, child by adoption, brother, sister, half brother, and half sister. No other family members are legally eligible to receive the pin.

Before addressing the differences between the two pins, we remind all those who are grieving the loss of someone who has served and died, that TAPS' services and programs are available to loved ones regardless of relationship, geography, or manner of death. We make no distinctions among us; each of our loved ones took the oath of enlistment and served honorably until death. \*



## Gold Star Lapel Button

The Gold Star Lapel Button was designated and created in 1947 for family members of those who died in combat. It is a gold star on a field of purple surrounded by laurel leaves. Gold Star Lapel Buttons are awarded to surviving family members of service members who have been killed in the specific conflicts listed in the "Information" section on the back of DD Form 3. The award authority is retroactive to World War I, and includes most subsequent conflicts. The law stipulates that only one button is furnished to each recipient, but a request for replacement of the Gold Star Lapel Button (lost, destroyed or unserviceable) can be submitted on DD Form 3 (Application for Gold Star Lapel Button) to NPRC, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63132-5100. If your loved one was killed during the time period of one of these conflicts, but not in the official area of the conflict you would receive the Next of Kin Deceased Personnel Lapel Button



## Next of Kin Deceased Personnel Lapel Button

The Next of Kin Deceased Personnel Lapel Button was approved in 1973 for the primary next of kin of armed services members who lose their lives while serving on active duty or while assigned in an Army Reserve or Army National Guard unit in a drill status. It is a gold star on a gold background surrounded by four oak sprigs. The pin is authorized for issue retroactive to March 29, 1973. If you are a relative listed above and your loved one died while on active duty, but under circumstances that do not qualify you for the Gold Star Lapel Pin, you are entitled to the Next of Kin Deceased Personnel Lapel Button. The next of kin may request issue of the button by writing to the NPRC, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63132-5100. Furnish the name, grade, SSN, and date of death of the deceased soldier. The names and relationships of the next of kin must also be provided.



# Presidential Memorial Certificates



The Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is a gold embossed certificate signed by the current President in memory of any honorably discharged deceased veteran. This includes any servicemember who died while serving honorably. Its purpose is simply to honor the memory of those who have served.



The certificate bears the name of the veteran along with an inscription expressing the nation's gratitude and recognition of the loved one's service in the United States Armed Forces.



## History

This program was initiated in March 1962 by President John F. Kennedy and has been continued by all subsequent Presidents. The veteran being honored, however, may have died at any time in the past.

## Administration

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers the PMC program through the National Cemetery Administration.

## Eligibility

Eligible recipients include the deceased veteran's next of kin and loved ones.

## Requests

Eligible recipients may apply for a PMC through several avenues: US Mail, toll-free fax, or in person at any VA Regional Office. A request form is available on the National Cemetery Administration website, [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov) (VA Form 40-0247), or the recipient may simply write a signed request, including the name of the deceased veteran (DO NOT include nickname, military rank, or civilian title), name and address of the person requesting the certificate, and the number of certificates being requested. A copy of the deceased veteran's military

discharge document along with a copy of the death certificate must be provided. DD1300 Report of Casualty would fulfill the documentation requirements. Send requests and supporting documentation:

### By Mail

*Presidential Memorial Certificates (41A1C)*  
5109 Russell Road  
Quantico, VA 22134-3903

### By Toll-Free Fax

(800) 455-7143





# TAPS Regional Seminar to Celebrate Office at Fort Hood

All are Welcome!



In partnership with the command at Fort Hood and the Army's Survivor Outreach Services (SOS), TAPS has opened an office at the Fort Hood Gold Star Family Support Center. The TAPS office is located on Battalion Avenue and shares a building with the Military Family Life Consultants and the SOS program coordinators. TAPS will provide resources, support, and information for surviving families in the region, and we look forward to welcoming you there!

## In addition, we are pleased to invite you to join us for a special Regional Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp

**FORT HOOD, TEXAS**

★ **August 14-16, 2009** ★

Two full days of events and workshops for adults and two full days of camp for the kids including individual mentors. This conference offers comfort and support, includes special events and memorial tributes, and gives you a wealth of information and resources.

Join us as we remember the love we have in our hearts, celebrate the life we were so blessed to know, and share our journey of grief together. Call 800-959-TAPS (8277) for more information about the office or about the Fort Hood Regional Seminar.

## Living with Loss MAGAZINE

Hope and Healing for the Body, Mind, and Spirit



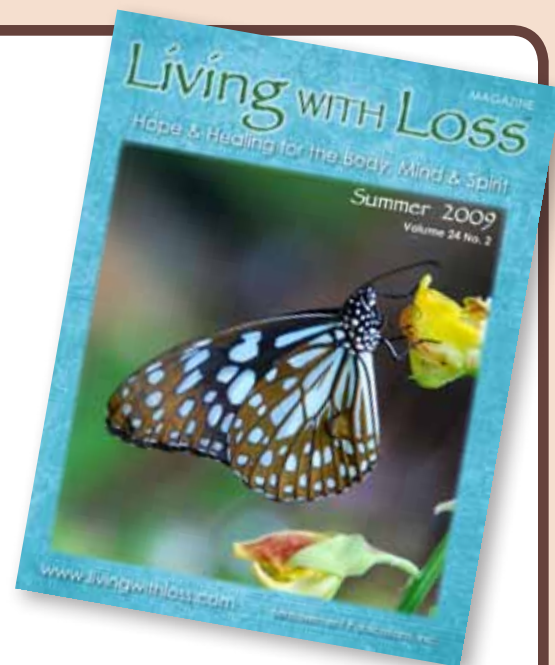
In honor of our fallen service members who have courageously served our country, the publisher of Living With Loss™ Magazine is offering TAPS families a special discount rate of \$28 (reg. price \$32) on a one-year subscription to the magazine.

Living with Loss features "Understanding Military Loss", a column intended to educate and inform the public about the unique challenges of grieving the loss of a service member. Other columns include issues and topics related to living with losses associated with death, terminal illness, cancer, jobs, natural disasters, aging, finances, divorce, mental health, physical challenges, and disabilities.

To place your order call Carla Blowey, Editor at (888) 604-4673 or email Carla at [editor@livingwithloss.com](mailto:editor@livingwithloss.com).

To order online go to:  
[www.livingwithloss.com](http://www.livingwithloss.com)

- 1 Choose Order Magazine in the menu box > Choose **#970** and add to Shopping Cart (your \$28 discount will be applied when your credit card is processed)
- 2 Proceed to Secure check-out and complete the billing information.
- 3 Proceed to Shipping page > Find the "Gift Message Box" > Enter this code: **TAPSLWL28** and the full name and rank of your service member.



- 4 Proceed to Payment Check Out and complete your order.
- 5 You will receive a confirmation email confirming the charge to your credit card for the \$28 discount price.



# Peer Mentor Profile

The heart of TAPS is the Peer Mentor Support network— survivors who have been trained and are willing to offer support to other survivors who are more recently bereaved. At TAPS we strive to match survivors with Peer Mentors whose losses are similar, although ultimately wounded hearts find solace with each other, even when circumstances differ. TAPS is grateful to its Peer Mentors— those special people who are able to reach through their own pain to help others cope with theirs.



## Yolanda Acevedo



Yolanda Acevedo first read about TAPS in a packet prepared by her Casualty Officer. Her husband, Navy Commander Joseph Acevedo, died on April 13, 2003 in the Middle East. But that wasn't Yolanda's first experience with death in the military. Her father had been killed in Vietnam in 1968. Yolanda already knew firsthand the devastating grief of surviving alone and isolated... especially for a child. She didn't want their two children to go through this suffering alone, so she made the call to TAPS exactly one year after Joe's death.

Yolanda decided to become a Peer Mentor after attending her second TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar. She has been serving in that capacity now for four years. She is especially valuable in her work with TAPS because she is bilingual (Spanish/English) with a working knowledge of Italian.

According to Yolanda, "The best thing about mentoring is the opportunity to give hope and to offer understanding. Grief can be a very dark and lonely place, and no one should have to go through such a traumatic experience alone. I remember how many times I needed someone to say 'It will be OK' or 'I know what you mean.' I want to be someone who brings that kind of message of



*Thank You  
Yolanda!*

hope, friendship, and understanding to another. The TAPS mentoring program has taught me how to be an effective and compassionate part of the healing process. It is an honor for me to be part of such a group. I keep learning more with every new person I come in

contact with." Yolanda's most significant experience in TAPS has been meeting so many strong and resourceful people who are kind and empathetic.

For Yolanda the hardest aspect of mentoring is the emotional toll it takes. Paradoxically, she also finds this to be one of the most important things about mentoring. "We as a society have a very short attention span. By being a mentor, I am reminded of how fragile life can be, and inspired to be more appreciative of all the blessings in my life, especially the immense sacrifice that the men and women in the military make every single day for each and every one of us. Mentoring is a constant reminder of the quiet and selfless sacrifice that military families make for our country."

Yolanda's husband loved the Navy and his country, but more than that he loved his shipmates. Yolanda tells us, "Joe taught me that when you treat people with respect and dignity, you receive more than you give. He lived by example. He was always there for his people, and I believe that in a way he is still taking care of them." For Yolanda, it is a duty, an honor, and a privilege to serve the loved ones of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. \*



# T★A★P★S Gala Raises Funds & Awareness



Helping the surviving families of our fallen military heroes was the focus of the 2009 TAPS Honor Guard Gala. The annual gala is a premier fundraising event for TAPS and enables us to continue the mission of supporting those who are grieving the loss of a loved one in military service to America. The Gala helps fund programs that provide emotional support, healing, and hope to military survivors.

The event was emceed for the second time by Kyra Phillips of CNN, and attended by surviving families, military leaders, sponsors, public figures, and dignitaries.

After the singing of the National Anthem by TAPS Survivor, Jessica Reed, the 2009 TAPS Honor Guard Congressional Award was presented to US Senator Jim Webb by TAPS Survivor, Jack May along with Marine Commandant General James Conway. The award recognized Senator Webb for his long-time support of military families.

Later in the evening, TAPS Survivors Billy and Joey Ruocco, along with LT Andy Baldwin, presented the TAPS Honor Guard Leadership Award to Major General Mark Graham.

"Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors is truly for survivors," said Graham. "TAPS touches every survivor. [It's] there for everyone, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They never take time off." Graham's son, Army 2nd Lt. Kevin Graham, was killed in Iraq in 2004 and his son Jeffrey Graham, took his own life while studying to become an Army physician.

In an address to the attendees, Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said, "We are grateful for everybody that is involved in what TAPS does. It's very easy for me to say that TAPS is really the gold standard... And I use it as a gold standard in my travels, in my discussions when I speak to people about organizations [that] reach out and help those who serve, and help the families who serve and have sacrificed so much."



*Major General Mark Graham  
with Joey and Billy Ruocco*



*Keynote Speaker,  
Tom Brokaw, NBC News*



*“Certainly all of us know that nobody goes through life alone, and nobody, but nobody should have to go through grief alone,” said Admiral Mullen, “But this is not just about lives lost. It must be about lives which have been lived and lives that are to be lived.” He continued, “TAPS helps people cope with loss and take action for life through diverse and innovative programs. TAPS’ efforts are as much about their future, if not more so, than about the past.”*

Tom Brokaw, keynote speaker, said, “I think it’s so important that we find ways to bond together in public and to understand the depth of the grief of these families and what they’re going through.” Speaking directly to the surviving families in attendance,



*TAPS Survivors with Admiral Mullen and Kyra Phillips*

the former NBC Nightly News anchor also said, “I want to pay a special, personal tribute to you who are here tonight - for reasons that they would rather not be - for their courage, for their bravery, and for serving as model citizens for the rest of us.” \*

*The 2009 TAPS Honor Guard Gala Presenting Sponsors were:*

*BAE Systems  
&  
TriWest Healthcare Alliance.*

*Sponsors were:*

*Dolphin Management Company, DRS Technologies, EOD Technology, General Dynamics, Green Beans Coffee Company, Health Integrated, Health Net Federal Services, Honeywell International, Humana Military Healthcare Services, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Mayer Brown LLP, Northrop Grumman, QinetiQ North America, Raytheon Company, Science Applications International Corporation, Telos Corporation, and Van Scoyoc Companies.*



*TAPS Supporter Gary Morris, Senator & Mrs. Jim Webb, Mr. & Mrs. Tom Brokaw*





# 15th T\*A\*P\*S National Military Survivor Seminar



**475**  
TAPS National  
Military Survivor  
Seminar attendees

**300+**  
Good Grief Camp kids

**300+**  
Military Mentors for  
Good Grief Camp

**100+**  
TAPS Volunteers

**29**  
Workshops

**20**  
Presenters

**5**  
Special Events

**4**  
Action-packed days



*The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors marked its 15th Annual TAPS Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors from May 22nd to May 25th at the Gaylord National Hotel and Conference Center at National Harbor near Washington, DC. For four days the TAPS family convened for special events, workshops, support groups, food, and even fun... something those who grieve find very little time for in the early months of bereavement. \**

*"There is an overwhelming sense of love and bonding as a big family reunion because we all have become that family through the death of our loved ones in the service of their country."*

★ **Debbi Rivers,**  
**Surviving Mom of Buck**

Opening Session of the four day conference brought comforting words from Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with his wife Deborah; Walt Havenstein, President and CEO of BAE Systems, TAPS Presenting Sponsor; and Darcie Sims, Keynote Speaker. The afternoon was spent in support groups, shopping in the Exhibitor's Hall, visiting with new friends, and preparing for the evening activity choices of major league baseball, bus tour of DC or Evening Parade at the Marine Barracks.

*"It was well worth it. The seminars and accommodations were excellent. My family has already decided to go back next year. I came home feeling so much better from all the seminars. They were extremely helpful. I cannot speak highly enough of the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar."*

★ **Sheila Marshall,**  
**Surviving Mother of Evan**

On Saturday, workshops were the order of the day, with presentations ranging from *Did My Loved One Suffer* to *The Other Side of Grief*. Workshops covered topics of interest to parents, siblings, spouses, those raising children, suicide survivors, disenfranchised grievers, and caregivers.





*"There really are no words to express my gratitude for presenting at the conference. I often use an expression when I lecture - I call it 'the communion of grief.' What you allowed for this past weekend is exactly that."*

★ **Diane Moran, Presenter**

Saturday Night's Grand Banquet brought us a visit with Navy LT Andy Baldwin, star of *The Bachelor*, and Dana Canedy, NYT Senior Editor and author of *A Journal for Jordan*. In addition, we were honored to hear from Lucy Fitch, Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications for BAE Systems; Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Norton Schwartz; Army Brigadier General Loree Sutton; and the band, In Remembrance, formed by surviving brother Nick Letendre.

*"What's great about TAPS is its utter dedication to so many suffering souls, people like me who lost a beloved soldier in service to America. Equally remarkable are the families who turn to this caring organization to get through the most difficult of times. What struck me about the people I met during the Annual National Military Survivor Seminar, was not the suffering but their strength. Sure, we shed some tears but there was also a lot of laughter and hugging. And then there is the work TAPS does for the children of fallen soldiers through the Good Grief Camp. It is nothing less than extraordinary. I am so glad that my son Jordan and I are now part of the TAPS family. As I have often said, even in tragedy there are blessings, and TAPS is proof of that."*

★ **Dana Canedy, Surviving Fiancée and Featured Speaker**

For four days the TAPS family ate together, wept together, laughed together, learned together, honored our loved ones together, and participated in one of our nation's most solemn ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day. We will treasure the memories and the love that we shared for this brief weekend as we look forward in anticipation to next year's "family reunion."

*"The entire seminar was amazing, the work you are all doing is amazing, and the healing that takes place is amazing."*

★ **Sandy Goodman, Presenter**





# 2009 National Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

By Adam Furtado



"I like that everybody in the room is your friend and you can relate to them." ~Alex, age 11



As military members, we often say that it is the greatest honor in the world to serve in the United States Armed Forces. This expression comes into question, though, for each one of us who volunteer to spend the Memorial Day weekend as mentors for the TAPS National Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors. Each year, military mentors from around the country, mostly Active Duty, prefer to give up their holiday weekends of cookouts and campfires to spend time with the most heroic group of children anyone has ever met. During those few days, we have the highest honor and greatest privilege of working with the children of our nation's fallen heroes.

Camp mentors, from all services and all ranks, are paired with each of these brave children for a weekend filled with laughs and tears. The relationship is difficult to describe, as it is unlike any other. The bond that is forged in these

three intense days is immeasurable. We as mentors know that we cannot fill the hole that is left by their loved ones, and do not try. But we are there to support these kids the best we can.

The weekend begins on Friday when we meet in groups, and our campers meet others from around the country just like them. Back in their hometowns they may not know anyone else that

has suffered a loss comparable to theirs. The Good Grief Camp is a chance for them to meet other people who have had some of the same feelings they have had, and an opportunity to open up and discuss it. There is finally someone their own age to talk to! Friday is an intense day of getting to know the other kids, and also getting to know the mentors.







★ "I like knowing that I am not the only one this has happened to." ~Sarah, age 9 ★

Saturday is mostly a day of fun: a chance to let loose and get rid of some pent up emotion. Our morning started this year with the TAPS/Rolling Thunder motorcycle rally outside the hotel. About 100 riders brought their motorcycles to show their support to more than 300 Good Grief Campers. The loud engines were a good way to make sure the children (and mentors) were awake.

Other Saturday activities included group sharing time, lunch in the Fort Myer chow hall, where we ate next to the soldiers on the Army post, and a visit to a Blackhawk Helicopter, specially flown in for the kids. This is a sight some of our kids know all too well. "My daddy died in one of those," you hear from more than one mentee. The caisson stables were the next stop. Many of the children saw the caisson horses at their loved one's funeral in Arlington National Cemetery. This time, the horses brought smiles to the faces of the children instead of the tears they brought the last time.

Saturday evening was our annual Good Grief Camp Bash back at the hotel, with more opportunities for releasing energy (and refueling on cotton candy). We enjoyed bounce houses, a Velcro wall, an obstacle course, Rock Band gaming stations, live band, DJ, face

painting and makeup, hair and nail stations, and a petting zoo. Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz stopped by to visit amid the activities, and show his support.

On our last day of camp, we focused on what brought everyone to TAPS. The children wrote letters to their loved ones, tied them to the strings of balloons, and released them heavenward. Air traffic at Reagan National Airport was halted for these messages to get safely to their destination. The USAF Honor Guard Drill Team performed for us, accompanied by many gasps and cheers and a picnic lunch for the Camp. Upon returning to our Good Grief Camp rooms, the groups met for their final Closing Circles. Each child and mentor had the opportunity to reflect on what the weekend meant to them. They shared what they learned from each other, and how it helped them.

After the close of camp each year, the camp mentors have their own Closing Circle with each other. We find that we get just as much out of this weekend as the children do. Memorial Day weekend is a three day break from our self-centered lives; a chance for us to give back to the people who deserve it most. We also know that should anything ever happen to us while serving, TAPS will be there

to support our families.

Many soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen have given their lives for our Country. As camp mentors, we agree that the very least we can do is spend a weekend with their children and younger siblings, giving them the opportunity to grieve, remember, and honor their fallen loved one, and share the journey together. The loved ones that we lost are heroes, but the young ones they left behind are the bravest, most amazing people I have ever met. I can't think of a better way to spend Memorial Day weekend.

### About the Author



**Adam Furtado,**  
Senior Airman, USAF,  
TAPS Good Grief Camp  
Group Leader and  
Logistics Coordinator



# Actor Director Ricky Schroder Lends Support



Ricky on the set of G.I. Jobs at Ft Hood

*When an American military member dies, family and loved ones are left behind. Left behind to rebuild a shattered life, cope with a devastating loss, and in many cases, separate from a community in which they have been a part of for years. As a nation, the best we can do to honor the service and dedication of these military members is to support and care for those left behind.*

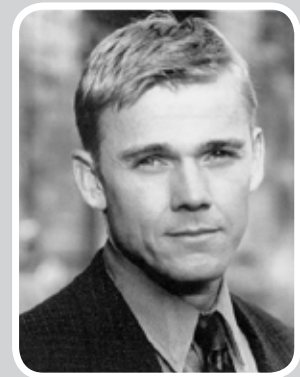
*It is in that spirit that the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors stands on the front lines to support and care for the families and loved ones of the brave men and women who have died in service to America. In speaking with Bonnie Carroll, founder of TAPS, I can sense the compassion and genuine care with which TAPS approaches its mission and the respect and honor that is given to our men and women in uniform. The work of TAPS is truly a labor of love and a testament to the power of the human spirit.*

*TAPS has been providing compassionate care for 15 years, opening their hearts to all who are suffering the loss of a loved one. Your hallmark program of a national peer support network provides an avenue for survivors from across the country to connect with each other, share experiences, and find hope and healing together. This program is served by volunteers; other survivors who are now ready to reach out and support others. I salute all of those who have suffered a loss in the past and are now contributing to this noble effort! I am humbled by the depth of your courage and your care for others.*

*Our nation's military is filled with brave individuals who sacrifice themselves for a greater purpose. It is our duty to honor that sacrifice by providing care for their loved ones. TAPS builds a foundation upon which grief can turn to hope and healing.*

**I am proud to be a friend of TAPS and to support your efforts!  
Thank you!!!!**

Best regards,  
*Ricky Schroder*



**Ricky Schroder** made his Hollywood debut at nine years of age as the son of a boxer in the 1979 remake of THE CHAMP. The performance earned him a Golden Globe® for "New Star of the Year" and launched the beginning of his successful career. Since then he has continued to win awards and please audiences. Child star, teen idol, award-winning actor and director, Ricky's career has spanned two decades and countless movies. Schroder lives with his wife Andrea and their four children in Los Angeles. He is currently working on a television show called "GI Jobs" for the Army. He also volunteers his time with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors.





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