

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

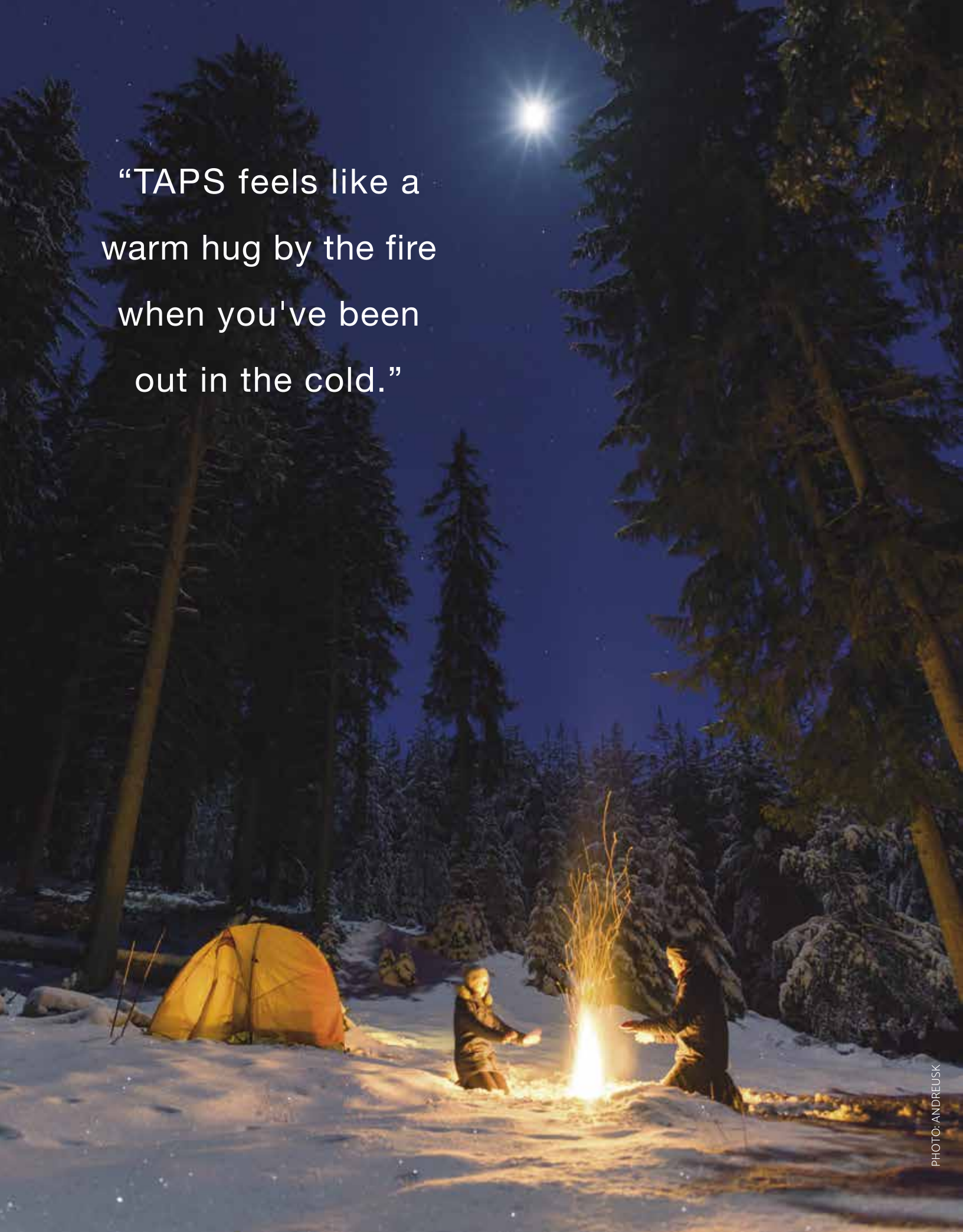
# TAPS®

WINTER 2018 | MAGAZINE



Healing your Holiday Grief ☆ New Beginnings  
Beyond Borders ☆ Camaraderie and Comfort

“TAPS feels like a warm hug by the fire when you've been out in the cold.”



# Foundation of Love

## To My TAPS Family,

Welcome to the winter issue of TAPS Magazine. We are so glad you have found our community. It is our hope you will feel the hug we are sending out to you and you will find support in the resources included here. TAPS is a family, and this holiday season, when there is so much emphasis on families coming together, we can take comfort in knowing we are not alone in our grief.



Throughout this issue, you will read articles of hope and healing, written by fellow survivors and members of our TAPS Advisory Board. This is your publication, your family newsletter, and we are grateful to everyone who contributed to this issue.

As we approach the holidays, remember the foundation of TAPS is love. The love we feel in our hearts transcends loss, warms our heart with precious memories and endures forever. We are the living legacy of those we honor and remember, and it is through our love for them and the good we do in their name that they live on.

Regardless of the holidays you celebrate or the faith you observe, this is a season of light. The flicker of a candle lit in honor of our heroes. The glow of a fire that warms us. The twinkle of a star in the winter sky that may be, according to Eskimo lore, our loved ones peering down from Heaven watching over us.

You are family; you are loved, and you have resources, support and care available to you through TAPS. You are not alone this holiday season; we are here for you. Light a candle in honor of those you love, and feel comfort in the knowledge that love lives on.

With hope,



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**Our Mission**  
The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors offers compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a military loved one. Our National Military Survivor Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at 800-959-TAPS (8277). For more about the resources we provide, turn to page 28.

## TAPS is here

**24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK**

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

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PHOTO: WAYNE MILLER



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Beyond Borders  
Bringing together the global  
community of survivors

# Dear TAPS...

## SUPPORTING OUR PARTNERS

On behalf of Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.), we thank you for granting our mental health professionals permission to share one of the terrific articles from a recent *TAPS Magazine* within our organization among survivors of law enforcement who have died in the line of duty. It's of no surprise that issues faced by survivors of deceased law enforcement officers are often similar to those grieving the loss of a military loved one. In fact, we know that many who die wearing a law enforcement uniform also once wore a military uniform and their loved ones may be involved with both TAPS and C.O.P.S. Thank you again for sharing your resources with an allied organization.

**Sara Slone**

*Camdenton, Missouri  
Director of Public Relations*

## TRULY PRICELESS

I returned home from this amazing adventure to Hollywood, CA. Though my hero Jeffrey and I were never formally bonded through matrimony, we were bonded through lifelong love and adoration, and his physical absence from this world has been heavy.

Given the opportunity to celebrate his life and honor his service and being a part of this experience with 23 other brave, strong women who shared memories and empathy and hugs and tears and laughter with one another in a loving, peaceful, understanding, and accepting way is absolutely, truly priceless. The only bigger gift I have ever been given was being touched with Jeffrey's presence in my life. Much, much love and gratitude.

**Jenna Kohler**

*Hampton, NJ  
Surviving significant other of  
FN Jeffrey M. Svoboda, USCG*



## STRENGTH TO SHINE

I just wanted to take a minute to thank you so very much for this amazing experience (TAPS College Experience week)! You've blessed us in such amazing ways and it was such a great treasure to see some of these kids really bloom and grow and SHINE last night. I was astounded by what I saw in Rory last night! She never talks to people like that! To see her come out of her shell and shine like never before was the most amazing gift! She feels ready to conquer the world after the meet and greet.

We truly appreciate all your hard work and effort for our kids. We would truly be lost without you!

**Heather McDermott**

*Medina, OH  
Surviving spouse of  
CPT Jacob Ian McDermott, USAF*

## DISCOVERING A CALLING

I am so glad I attended the 2018 Seminar - for whatever reason it has deeply changed me. I know I personally find the gathering of women to be a powerful environment and believe this has played into how the Seminar affected me. Whatever the reasons I just

wanted to share how profoundly affected I am and that I do feel re-energized and hopeful.

And yes, I would very much like to participate more fully by becoming a Peer Mentor. Supporting others is important to me AND I am good at it. This role at TAPS is calling to me and would be honored to be able to assist in this way. Thank you for our conversation that evening ~ you inspired and kick-started me.

**Judy Waleryszak**

*Seattle, WA  
Surviving spouse of  
Sgt. Thomas Francis Waleryszak,  
Veteran, USArmy*

## LIFE SAVING CONTACT

After my husband died by suicide I found TAPS. After hopelessness, misery and self-blame, I called the 800 # and the lady was really understanding. The next day Jennifer Burns called me and she changed my life. Saved my life. I'm forever grateful for all of you. I'm so incredibly grateful!

**Debbie Moore**

*Royce City, TX  
Surviving spouse of  
Thomas Gary Moore, Veteran, USN*

## PILLAR OF SUPPORT

You (Terri Jones) and TAPS have my eternal gratitude for the love and support you have given me over the past two years. It has been a long, difficult road, which I cannot imagine traveling without the assistance of so many people. As you know, there will always be scars, but some measure of healing is possible. I am also very grateful for the help I received from my Mentor, Michael. He has been a steadfast pillar of support to me and even now continues to reach out to me to check on my wellbeing.

If I ever may be of assistance to you or TAPS, please let me know. I am forever in your debt.

### Robert Armstrong

Coralville, IA  
Surviving father of  
SGT Mark Douglas Armstrong, USMC

## READY FOR HELP

I remember my CAO (Casualty Assistance Officer) who I didn't want to be there, handing me a folder I didn't want packed with info I didn't want.

My CAO was there because my husband had just been killed in Iraq. I didn't want that to be real. I didn't want him to say one more word to me and I didn't want that stupid folder, because I didn't want to believe any of the information applied to me. I didn't want to know about grief. I didn't want to know about raising small children without their father. I didn't want to be a widow. I wasn't ready. I threw the folder in a box and left it there.

Years later I found it. This time I was ready. I opened the folder, saw the info about Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, and I made the call.

That's when Bonnie Carroll came into our lives.

Thank you Bonnie for all you have done and all you do. Thank you to TAPS for understanding when someone is ready for help and when they are not. Thank you for helping me and my boys.

### Barbara Allen

Partner and Head Writer,  
American Snippets  
Otisville, NY  
Surviving spouse of  
1LT Louis Allen, ArmyNG



## Connect with Us!

### WRITE TO US

This is your magazine! We welcome your thoughts about anything you read in our pages or any experience you have with TAPS. Please write to us at [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).

### SHARE YOUR STORY

Your stories can bring hope and healing to TAPS families. We invite you to share a story about your loved one or your grief journey. All submissions will be considered for TAPS Magazine, our blogs at [taps.org](http://taps.org), and other TAPS publications. We invite you to read our submission policy and submit your story at [taps.org/shareyourstory](http://taps.org/shareyourstory).

### JOIN US ONLINE

Find information about our resources, programs, and events on our website [taps.org](http://taps.org). You'll also find our blog with stories of survivor strength and healing. Our Online Community host chat sessions for connection to others from the comfort of home. Learn more at [taps.org/onlinecommunity](http://taps.org/onlinecommunity).

### SUBSCRIBE TO THE SATURDAY MORNING MESSAGE

The Saturday Morning Message is a weekly email written by and for survivors to provide support along the grief journey. To subscribe, send a request to [online@taps.org](mailto:online@taps.org).

### FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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For more on TAPS resources and support, turn to page 28.

# Healing Your *Holiday Grief*

## Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebration

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

If you could go back in time and relive a special holiday, which one would you choose? Close your eyes for a moment and think about this holiday. Now, slowly, walk through this memory in your mind.

What made it so special? What were the surroundings like? Who inhabits this memory with you?

Holidays have such rich associations for us because humankind created them as a way to honor and celebrate that which is truly important. We step out of the hustle and bustle of our day-to-day routines and into a world where our spiritual beliefs and connection to others matter above all else. We give pause to give thanks, and we share of ourselves.

As the Grinch learned that memorable Christmas, the holidays don't really come from a store—they come from the heart and soul.

Which is why when someone loved dies, the holidays can be so very painful. The

heart of the holidays has been torn apart. Without love, what is life? Without the people we love, what are the holidays?

I want you to know that you can find continued meaning in the holidays and in life. You can continue to live and love fully. You must grieve but you can also celebrate.

### *Setting Your Intention to Heal*

It takes a true commitment to heal in your grief. Yes, you are changed, but with commitment and intention you can and will become whole again. Commitment goes hand in hand with the concept of “setting your intention.” Intention is defined as being conscious of what you want to experience. A close cousin to “affirmation,” it is using the power of positive thought to produce a desired result.

How can you use this in your journey through holiday grief? By setting your intention to heal.

### *Turning to Ritual*

Setting your intention to mourn and heal during the holidays—and beyond—is one important way to move forward in your grief journey. Harnessing the power of ritual is another. We create holiday rituals because everyday activities and normal conversations cannot capture our most profound thoughts and feelings. Rituals give them voice and shape. So, we decorate our Christmas trees, light our menorahs, give gifts, hold hands and say prayers.

During your time of grief, the very rituals of the holidays can help you survive them. Try participating in some of your normal holiday traditions but with a focus on your grief. When you light candles in your home, do it in honor of the person who died. You might also create a special holiday ceremony or private ritual in memory of the person who died. The holidays are ritualistic and ritual can help you survive (and heal) right now. Remember this when you are considering whether or not to participate in your next holiday tradition.





*Living in the Now*

Return once more to the holiday memory I asked you to conjure up at the beginning.

This memory is so special to you because you were so very present to the moment.

When your grief overwhelms you this holiday season, try focusing on the now. Your grief wants you to live in the past through memories of the precious person who died. Remembering is indeed important, and your memories will always be a special part of your life.

Your grief will also project you into the future at times. You will worry about what the coming months and years hold for you. Looking ahead is also a normal and natural part of grief.

But when remembering and projecting exhaust you—and they will—return yourself to the present moment.

Concentrate on what is going on around you right now. Hear the sounds and see the sights. Try drawing on the power of now to find continued meaning in your holidays and in your life.

You'll notice I have used the generic term "holiday season." By that I mean the winter holidays bookended, in the United States, by Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. In between are the spiritual/religious holidays of Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. But whatever holidays you celebrate and no matter where you live, the principles apply to the holidays that are most meaningful for you—including other holidays, birthdays and anniversaries sprinkled throughout the calendar year.

PHOTO: JOANNA KOSINSKA

★ **BE COMPASSIONATE WITH YOURSELF**

Let your holiday grief be what it is. And let yourself—your new, grieving self—be who you are.

★ **SURVIVE**

If the death was very recent, you may be in survival mode this holiday season. If that's true for you, it's OK—the world will keep turning whether you participate in the holidays or not.

★ **KEEP WHAT MATTERS**

You might consider simplifying your holiday rituals instead of abandoning them altogether. Keep the traditions that matter most to you and set the others aside, at least for now.

★ **COMMUNICATE YOUR WISHES**

Muster the strength and courage to tell the people in your life what your wishes are for the holidays. If you'd like their company but prefer to gather somewhere different than you usually do, say so. If you'd rather skip some of the celebrations this year, tell them. If you're feeling unsure about how to spend the holidays, tell them.

★ **ATTEND A REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY**

Many hospitals, hospices and funeral homes host remembrance ceremonies during the holidays. The act of joining together in our grief and ritualizing our mourning can be very healing. Especially early in their grief, many families say it was the most important thing they did during the holidays.

★ **HANG A SPECIAL STOCKING**

If your holiday traditions include hanging stockings, consider hanging a special stocking in memory of the person who died.

★ **BE A SECRET SANTA**

You could probably use some "feeling good" this holiday season. Give yourself a dose of pleasure by giving to someone else.

★ **PREPARE FAVORITE HOLIDAY FOODS OF THE PERSON WHO DIED**

Special foods are an important part of the holiday traditions. Chances are your family prepares many of the same dishes each holiday, and everyone looks forward to those unique smells and flavors.

★ **IF YOU'RE ALONE, FIND WAYS TO CONNECT**

If you're alone this holiday season, you need to make an effort to connect with other human beings. Invite your neighbor to dinner. Volunteer at a homeless shelter or nursing home. Join a group at a place of worship.

★ **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH A GRIEF COUNSELOR**

Seeing a counselor or spiritual advisor for just a session or two over the holidays may help you cope better and focus more on what is important to you this year and what is not.

★ **COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS**

Think of all you have to be thankful for. This is not to deny the hurt, for the hurt needs to take precedence right now. But it may help to consider the things that make your life worth living, too.

★ **BELIEVE IN A BETTER NEXT YEAR**

Believe in a better next year. Believe in your capacity to heal and grow through grief. Believe in the enduring holiday spirit of giving and love. ★

*I wish you peace this holiday season.*

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., is the founder and director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. This article is excerpted from his book *Healing your Holiday Grief, 100 Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebration During the Holiday Season*, published by Companion Press and available at [centerforloss.com](http://centerforloss.com).



# Charlie Brown's *Search for Meaning*

It's okay not to feel the way you think you're supposed to feel

By Emily Muñoz | Surviving Spouse of Capt. Gilbert A. Muñoz, U.S. Army

There are few things more iconic in American cartoon art than the ongoing story of several friends, one beagle, and one bird in Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*. Schulz penned this strip regularly for almost fifty years, over the course of which we watch Lucy, Peppermint Patty, Marcy, and the rest of the characters dabble in everything from sports and curbside psychiatry to bad hygiene and attachment issues. Among his many contributions to popular culture, we

can even count the term "security blanket" - which Schulz coined for his character Linus.

*Peanuts* ended with Schulz's farewell announcement, published the day after his death in February 2000. (The timing was unintentional. Schulz submitted the farewell, then retired to his room, where he died in his sleep). Some might say that the timing - the end of the cartoon and the end of Schulz's life - could not have been better scripted. Yet, no ending in the cartoon, his labor of love, was ever tied up so neatly.

It is so by the creator's design. There are *Peanuts* comics where the characters wonder what it's like to have a broken heart and not be able to sleep, storylines where Snoopy is aimless and dissatisfied on Sunday afternoons, sketches about worry and anxiety and failure. In all of them, the characters were left, like all of us, with feelings that were unresolved.

Schulz himself noted that the football is always pulled away; the loves are always unrequited; The Great Pumpkin never comes. Just like for us, there isn't always an easy answer. Often, the last scene in the comic strip shows one of the characters disappointed, bereft, or forlorn.

In this way, Charles Schulz introduced a level of melancholy into the mainstream. Beyond the touching scenes and sentiments like, "happiness is a warm puppy," he also allowed readers an unexpected and beautiful gift. In stepping away from the

comic strip, we realize that, between laughs, the characters were showing us how humans, even sports- and beagle-loving children, learn to ache.

If you've ever watched A Charlie Brown Christmas, you'll remember that - no matter what form your holiday celebrations take - there is no time when Charlie Brown struggles more with his questions of purpose, fulfillment, and belonging. Walking with his best friend Linus, Charlie says, "I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel."

He goes on to say that he likes presents, cards, and decorations, but that "I'm still not happy. I always end up feeling depressed." As the show progresses, Charlie Brown's malaise plays out as frustration with the petty concerns of the season - his sister Sally's wish list, his friends' attack on his taste in trees, and how being laughed and misunderstood magnifies his feelings of loneliness.

In the story, it's Linus who says, "Of all the Charlie Browns in the world, you're the Charlie Browniest!" when Charlie Brown confides his discontent. What it's easy to miss in this superlative however, is that we're all Charlie Brown sometimes. We all wrangle with the very definable ache of grief, and we all wrestle with that often-unplaceable ache of what it means to be searching for meaning in a world that often makes little sense. If you're



feeling a little like Charlie Brown this season, it's okay.

Seasonal changes can be hard because they are another way to mark time. In addition, we're told that this season is for "togetherness" and "family," but we know all too well that this meaning changes with time, circumstance, and even where we are in our own grief and spiritual journeys. It's also too easy to make comparisons, to look at outcomes in "other families," to believe the illusions that all is magic. We struggle with how much we've lost and how much remains. Maybe we've never been told before that gratitude has its own blunt edge - that, for everyone, fullness and longing can exist side by side.

Charlie Brown echoes our grief experience when he says that he just doesn't understand and that he doesn't need a holiday to remind himself that he's different. We know that, no matter what our traditions are or were, there will always be something that isn't quite right. Being "a little bit Charlie Brown" this season isn't about giving into depression or isolation. In fact, it's the opposite - it's about universalizing it. It's about knowing that, for everyone, sometimes emotions feel like heavy chains and not shiny tinsel. It's about doing the best you can given what you are emotionally equipped to do at the time.

If you're feeling a little bit like Charlie Brown this season, here are some things that might help you feel a little less alone.

### › TAKE LUCY'S ADVICE

When Charlie Brown swings by Lucy's advice stand, saying, "Instead of feeling happy, I feel let down," she gives him some sage (if glib) advice. "You need involvement! You need to get involved in some real Christmas project!" And so Charlie Brown becomes the director of the holiday play, the backdrop against which his subsequent dejection and brave hope both occur. Involvement was part of the answer for Charlie Brown; it may be for you, too. Maybe your project is volunteering, or maybe your project is escaping on a cruise. Maybe you give

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*Charlie Brown gets frustrated with his perceived shortcomings, but it's his honesty that helps us (and him) stay present and keep moving forward.*

---

yourself something to look forward to that has nothing to do with any pressures of the season. It could be the right time to pick up a hobby, work overtime, or focus on your physical health and fitness (it's easier to cope with everything when your body and mind have done good, hard work.) Remember, too, that Lucy's advice only cost a nickel (which may be affordable no matter your stance on healthcare reform), so if you get advice that feels worthless to you, or that doesn't resonate with what you need, well, seek it somewhere else.

### › TAKE SCHROEDER'S ADVICE

Schroeder's choice in music for the production is criticized, but he knows what he wants. Choose your own soundtrack - both musically and verbally. If you're around people who are trying to demean your opinions - whether those opinions are about decorations, feelings, or why you like the David Hasselhoff holiday album - then you're just going to feel less like being engaged in the world around you. In the *Peanuts* version, when Schroeder is feeling a sense of self-determination and is confident in his choices, his toy piano sounds like a real piano or an organ. When he feels smaller, his piano sounds smaller. Remember that this happens with us, too. Don't be afraid to find your voice. Charlie Brown and his friends are, in many ways, frozen in their dynamic, but you're not.

### › USE YOUR OWN CHARLIE BROWN

Charlie Brown does a lot right - he's honest and vulnerable; he doesn't hide his feelings; he seeks the advice of his trusted, if imperfect friends; he walks away when he knows deep down that he needs to do so; he allows himself moments to reflect in the open air. He takes comfort in his dog.

Part of the *Peanuts* ethos is that we still hope that Charlie Brown will hit a home run - we still hope that there will be joy. Charlie Brown doesn't trust it all the time. In fact, he'll make a decision to make the best of things one minute; in the next minute, he'll declare everything ruined. Allow yourself to safely swing as you need to between these extremes, without holding yourself firmly to either one. Feelings treated as feelings, not as commitments, pass and resolve - or else they persist and we are compelled to seek some sort of deeper resolution with them.

Charlie Brown gets frustrated with his perceived shortcomings, but it's his honesty that helps us (and him) stay present and keep moving forward. It's uncomfortable, but it's universal. Either way, the reason why we have loved *Peanuts* for more than fifty years is that, even reluctantly, and even grumpily, on a daily basis - there doesn't have to be a resolution for there to be hope.

So if you're feeling a little bit like Charlie Brown, remember why millions of people love him and know that your TAPS family loves you, too. ☆



# Steering *into* the Skid

## A Strategy for Coping with Grief

By Randy Beard, surviving dad of Army SPC Bradley S. Beard

Grief feels a lot like winter. Winter is cloudy, overcast, and cold. The heavy, gray skies make you want to withdraw. People tend to stay closed up indoors, isolated from their friends. The days are dark and icy and bleak. Our family's grief-winter started when two Army officers showed up on our doorstep early one morning in October 2004. It felt like a cloud of winter descended over everything. Its icy fingers reached into every crevice. My heart, my mind, and my world were forever changed.

The wintry blast of the news of Brad's death was disorienting. My mind careened between confusion and disbelief and the awful truth. I was reeling with bits and pieces of information: confusing press releases and interview requests and questions of when Brad's body would be sent back from the war zone and where would he be buried and on and on and on. My thoughts swirled around like a blizzard, so thick that I could barely see the landscape of reality. What would this mean for our family going forward? Now our challenge was to adjust to a world without Brad in it.

Just as winter settles in for a season, grief settled in for a much longer season than

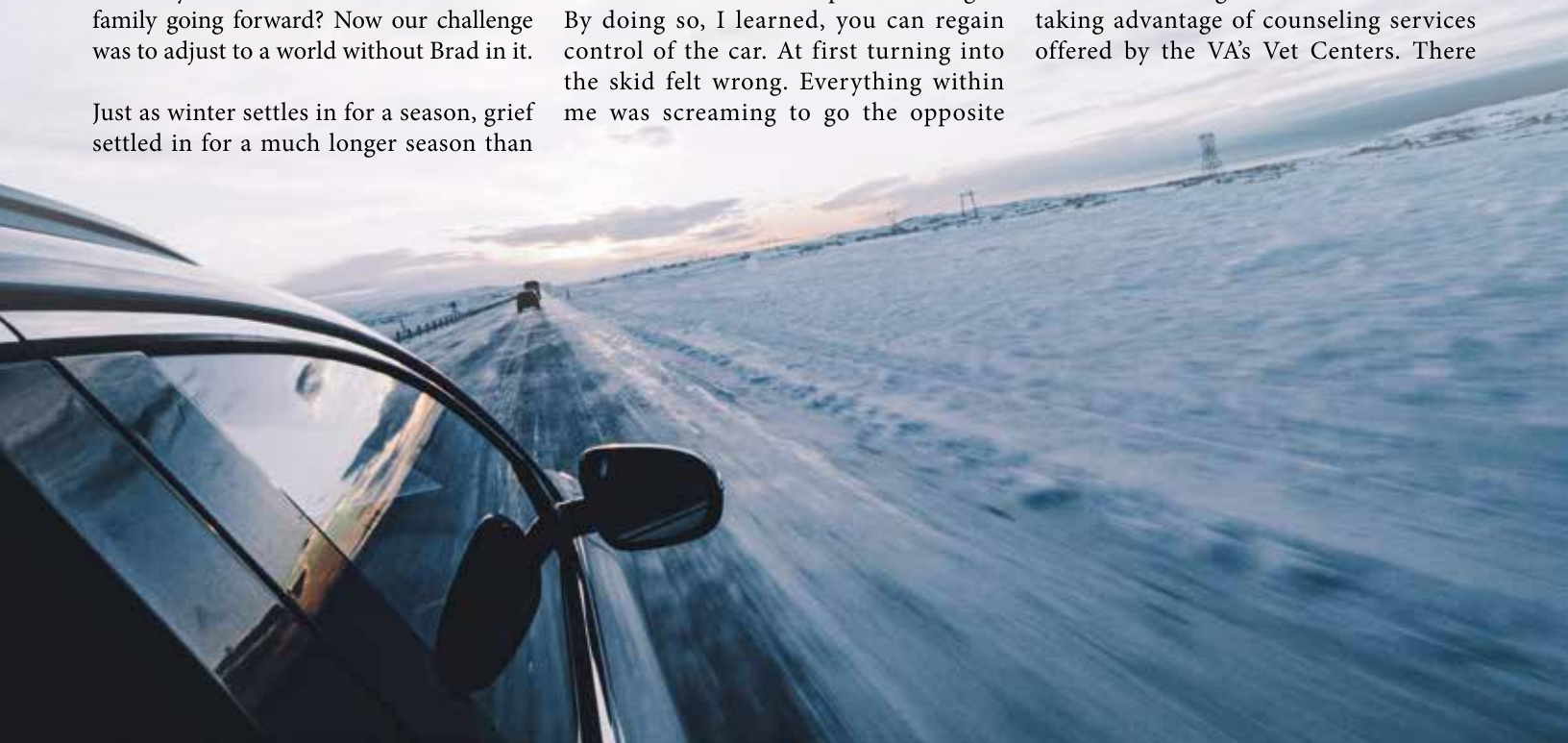
I had thought possible. It's been six years now since Brad's death. In looking back, I realize that some of the same strategies for coping with winter weather apply to coping with grief, in particular a driving technique for slippery roads.

When I was young, I lived in Pennsylvania and had to learn to drive in the snow and ice. At that time, most cars were rear-wheel drive vehicles. The engine and all its weight were in the front, but the wheels that propelled the car were in the rear. In slippery conditions, a rear-wheel drive vehicle could lose traction easily since the rear end was light. In making a left turn, for example, the rear wheels could break traction and swing wildly toward the right. The driver's natural reaction would be to turn the wheel further to the left. The result would be an uncontrollable skid, or spinout. The correct way to counteract the skid is to turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid: in this example, to the right. By doing so, I learned, you can regain control of the car. At first turning into the skid felt wrong. Everything within me was screaming to go the opposite

way, to turn away from the perceived danger. Until I had practiced the technique often and successfully, it was pretty scary.

I find that grieving feels a lot like driving on snow and ice in a rear-wheel drive car. Although it may feel counter intuitive, it helps to steer into the wild emotions of grief, purposely setting your course to go toward them. After Brad was killed, I really wanted to avoid experiencing the waves of grief and sadness that came my way. The emotions were so intense they were frightening. I thought that if I allowed myself to feel the emotions of loss I would start an uncontrollable skid. As a guy, I wanted to steer clear of the "messy" emotional turmoil. What I discovered, though, was that when I allowed myself to experience the intensely sad emotions, I seemed to emerge on the other end with a better sense of equilibrium.

For me, steering into the skid meant taking advantage of counseling services offered by the VA's Vet Centers. There





was a set time and place every week for me to encounter the turmoil and express my grief in a safe environment, a place where I could give voice to my sadness and loss. I found that trying to express what was going on inside helped me to understand and endure the blizzard-like whirlwind of emotion.

According to John MacDougall, manager of Spiritual Care and the Family Program at a private nonprofit treatment center in Minnesota, “Our bodies are not well designed for the storage of feelings, but they are well designed for the expression of feelings. Grief doesn’t go away, and the longer it is denied, the more powerful it can become.” Some emotions are difficult for us men; some are easy. Anger is usually easy. Not only does it come naturally, but it is considered okay for a man to be angry. Other emotions are more troublesome. Sad, for me, was difficult. Feeling helpless was another challenging thing for me. I felt helpless as I watched my wife and daughter’s incredible sadness and was not able to do anything to alleviate their pain.

Steering into the skid means examining, acknowledging, and expressing the scary negative emotions with other family members and friends, as well. I learned that I didn’t make things “worse” for my wife and daughter by talking about Brad. Indeed, they shed tears when we talked

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*I find that grieving feels a lot like driving on snow and ice in a rear-wheel drive car. Although it may feel counter intuitive, it helps to steer into the wild emotions of grief, purposely setting your course to go toward them.*

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about him, but not talking about him wasn’t making it “better.” I might have been steering away from the skid for myself, but the conclusions they might draw from my silence would not reflect what was truly going on with me. They might think that I wasn’t sad, that I didn’t miss him, that I was doing just fine, or even that I was “over” Brad’s death. None of these were true, but my silence certainly could not communicate my real internal state. During the times that we talked about Brad there were tears, but my talking about Brad did not cause those tears; it just released them.

In the same way that winter always seems too bitter and too long, I was not at all prepared for the intensity of the sadness or the length of time that it took for me

to begin to enjoy life again. I still would like to have my son back every day, but the intense, elephant-sitting-on-my-chest pain has subsided to a quiet sadness that many people don’t even notice.

As I navigated my grief-winter, I remember seeing the first sign of a returning “spring.” The first time I laughed I felt guilty that I could find anything funny. I mean, how could I? Brad was dead. I remember thinking that I shouldn’t have to give myself permission to laugh. And then the next day as I struggled at my job, I had to give myself permission to feel sad. I realized that I didn’t have to function like I did before. A friend of ours whose husband had died before Brad was killed wrote us a letter in which she said, “I get frustrated with myself because I can’t engineer my recovery of equilibrium any faster. The seasons of our lives must be lived through, however, not jumped over if we want to be whole.”

Because we love someone who died, we must live through the winter of loss. We can’t jump over it or get around it or get over it. Acknowledging and expressing grief is a difficult road to navigate, but the price you pay trying to detour around it can be much worse. Don’t try to avoid the wintry patches on your grief road, but rather remember to steer into the skid. ★

ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN VOLUME 16 • ISSUE 4

# Coping with the Holidays

## Advice from TAPS Survivors

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

### ASHLEY DEASON

#### *Surviving sister of Mike*

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

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

### LESLIE SILVERMAN SHAPIRO

#### *Surviving mother of Eugene*

This is our second Chanukah and second birthday (he was born December 20) without him. I found that making new memories and doing the holidays



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

differently helped. The pain doesn't go away; you just learn to cope better. I would suggest you think of some funny stories about your loved one, tell one, and have each person there tell something fun about your loved one as well. That way your loved one is included. You need to remember that you are not the only one suffering.

**ROSE BARGO**

*Surviving spouse of Troy*

This will be the second holiday season that my husband was not here physically to celebrate holidays with us. I don't think about him as dead; I think of him as deployed. I know it sounds crazy, but this helped me get through my first holiday without him. I also wear my t-shirt with my husband's picture on it. That makes me feel he's with me everywhere I go. My bedroom is filled with my husband's pictures, and sometimes I talk to his picture, and I wrote letters to him which told him of our everyday life. It helps me go through every day, the holidays past, and holidays that are coming.

**BILL SMITH**

*Surviving father of Brandon*

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

**MARY-ANN MCLENDON**

*Surviving mother of Blake*

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

happiness of the season again. I want to. It just hasn't happened yet. Maybe next year.

**SARAH COAST**

*Surviving twin of Robbie*

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

**DEB BONN**

*Surviving mother of Beth*

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

**PAM LEWIS**

*Surviving mother of Joe*

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

I'm not saying that there aren't crying days; there still are. Just not as many.

**JEANNE WEAVER**

*Surviving mother of Todd*

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

**ANDI RALYEA**

*Surviving sister of Jon*

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

ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN VOLUME 19 • ISSUE 4

2018 National Military

# Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Our Story Continues... *and the Love Lives On*








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*Each time I attend this very special TAPS seminar I come away refreshed, strengthened and mirroring a new metaphor. For this coming year I will landscape my spiritual garden with a sundial; in the healing warmth of the light I will move forward.*

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*Thank you TAPS for gifting me with wishes upon a star after thinking I'd never again experience joy and magic and love.*

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# *New Beginnings* *in the Winter Stillness*

Erin Jacobson | Senior Advisor, Outreach and Engagement

When we journey into winter, a new rhythm emerges. Nature's pace slows down; the earth becomes more still and turns inward. Animals go into hibernation; the fallen leaves return to the soil to nourish new growth; snow covers the hardened ground. Darkness comes early in the afternoons, closing out our days much sooner than the hazy evenings of summer. We, too, take our cues from nature, beginning instinctively to look inward. We take stock of where we

have been and sift through thoughts of where we want to go. This takes courage. The work of the winter season isn't as showy as the work of the spring, but it is just as important.

As the New Year approaches, instead of glibly making a quick resolution or two, honor this process by setting aside time to listen to what's happening internally. It can be scary to take an honest look at our lives and assess where we are; this is especially

true when the loss of a loved one is involved. Fear and pain are powerful motivators to shut down the part of us that wants to dream. But change is possible. New, good things can and will come again. We don't have to give into believing that what happens to us is the most important part of our story. What would it be like to choose new dreams or new purpose, even in our grief? What would it be like to dare to dream of something new?





Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths in and out. Imagine what your life would be like in the best possible scenario. Bring to your mind's eye what that might look like. What are the things that surround you? What emotions do you feel? How does your body feel? Who are the people in your life? What are you doing? What is making you happy? What do you touch, taste and hear? Make that picture as clear and as specific as possible. Hone in on one or two things that are the most important to you in this new vision of your life. When the time is right, open your eyes and write down what you see for yourself. Include the details that you see and write them down clearly. This step is important so that as time goes on and the difficulty of change comes calling, you can remind yourself of what that best possible self looks like.

Two other helpful practices you can utilize in reminding you of your goals are the creation of vision boards and intention bracelets. To create a vision board, find a few old magazines, scissors, glue and

a large piece of craft paper. Watercolor paper and poster board are both sturdy choices to use but any paper will work. To begin, flip through the magazines and notice words and images that remind you of the vision you wrote down of what you want your life to look like. Rip out anything that resonates without thinking too much about it. If you don't end up using everything, that is fine. It is more important to have a selection from which to choose. Once you feel like you have enough, begin to sort through them to create a picture of what you want to manifest in your life. Some people use primarily words and others create ones mostly made up of pictures, so everyone's vision board is different. There is no right or wrong way to create the board; this is about you and a visual reminder of what you want. Have fun with it and let your creative juices flow! Once you've completed your vision board, put it up in your home in a place where you see it daily to help encourage you to maintain a connection with your intentions.

Intention bracelets can be powerful daily reminders. Although it's possible to use an existing piece of jewelry, it is more powerful to create something specifically for this purpose. It can be as simple as tying a band of leather around your wrist or as intricate as creating a bracelet from beautiful beads or materials from your local craft store. Again, this is about you and giving tools to help you on your path. When you look at your bracelet, it is a constant reminder of taking the steps needed to reach your goal.

The final step in creating successful change is to include others in your plan. Talk to one or two trusted people in your life and tell them what you are working toward. Develop a plan with them to help get you there. None of us can do this work on our own. We need others to walk along the journey with us to help along the way. As the winter season goes on and shifts into the next season, your internal growth will begin to emerge along with the buds of spring. ★

*You are warmly invited to attend the*

# **25th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**

★ *Memorial Day Weekend* ★  
*May 24 – 27, 2019 ~ Arlington, VA*

*Join your TAPS family for a weekend of connection, reflection, and inspiration at the 25th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. As we remember the love, celebrate the life, and share the journey, we'll illuminate paths of healing, hope, and connection.*

Just as the stars brighten the night, our TAPS family brings light into the darkness of grief. At the 25th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, we'll focus on the light of the love we have shared and continue to share. We'll look more deeply into our own processes, reflect on our strengths, learn how we can give and accept support, and contemplate how we'll approach the next part of our grief journeys.

Knowing the relief of being understood, we'll look to each other with empathy and open hearts. Our programming will encourage meaningful connections, cultivate strength for exploring emotions and resources, and lift your spirits.



# Open Hearts, Open Arms, Sacred Spaces

## PLAN TO BE WITH TAPS OVER MEMORIAL DAY

Registration can be accessed through our website at [www.taps.org/national](http://www.taps.org/national). For this year only, in celebration of 25 years of care, the registration fee for all attendees will be \$25 (adult or child).

### ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Plan to arrive Thursday for early registration or early Friday morning for our opening sessions. Friday morning check-in will be available, but we want you to have as much time with your TAPS Family as possible before our opening session and keynote address. Our event concludes Monday afternoon after attending the National Memorial Day Observance at Arlington National Cemetery or the National Memorial Day Parade.

## YOUR HOME FOR MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

All events and workshops for the 25th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp take place in, or depart from, the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Virginia. The closest airport is Washington Reagan National Airport (DCA), and free shuttles to the hotel are available.

To make your hotel reservation, visit the seminar webpage at [www.taps.org/national](http://www.taps.org/national) to get our special conference rate of \$145 per night. The last day you can register for the seminar and reserve a room at this guaranteed rate is Friday, April 26, 2019.

A limited number of scholarships are available for those who have financial need. Please visit [taps.org/national](http://taps.org/national) for more information or call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

### PEER MENTOR TRAINING

We welcome those who are at least 18 months beyond their own loss to become a TAPS Peer Mentor. TAPS provides a full day of instruction to prepare you and ongoing guidance to support you as you offer your care and experience to a newly bereaved survivor. If you are interested, please register for the Peer Mentor Training as a part of general registration and visit the Peer Mentor Program webpage: [www.taps.org/BecomeAPeerMentor](http://www.taps.org/BecomeAPeerMentor)



## 25TH ANNUAL TAPS NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP

Start planning now to join us over Memorial Day weekend. Go to [www.taps.org/national](http://www.taps.org/national) to register.

# 25TH ANNUAL TAPS NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP

*Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey*

## NEW TO TAPS

Whether your loss is recent or you are new to TAPS, you will be welcomed with open arms to our national event. A special orientation will be available for you on Friday morning to provide an overview of the seminar as well as information on other newcomer groups that will meet throughout the weekend. TAPS staff and peer mentors will be on hand to guide you and surround you with the loving care of your new TAPS family.

Even if you're some years out from your loss, prioritizing these "first-timer" sessions will help you feel grounded and connected. You'll have a chance to meet others who have just found their way to TAPS and start to pick out familiar faces. You'll make new friends and meet staff who will be present for you during the weekend.

## RETURNING SURVIVORS

Returning survivors are able to take advantage of new programming options as well as some of our important traditional workshops, all tailored to the various stages of the grief journey. In addition to familiar topics such as understanding complicated grief and coping with family dynamics, we will introduce you to new speakers and workshops. As grief changes, so do our perspectives. We also encourage you to experience familiar speakers and workshop leaders from changing vantage points - what didn't speak to you one year might resonate the next.

## YOUNG SURVIVORS

TAPS Good Grief Camp for young survivors is America's premier program for children and teens whose parent or sibling has died in military service. In our unique model,

children are paired with trained mentors who support them as they explore their feelings, learn coping skills, and have fun in a place where they feel connected with other children who experienced a similar loss. Because each developmental stage presents new perspectives and different challenges, young survivors (ages 4 to 19) are encouraged to attend. The very youngest members of our TAPS family (0-3 years) will be cared for by loving childcare professionals.

## YOUNG ADULTS

To fill the gap between Good Grief Camp and adult programming, TAPS has developed an insightful, fun and comforting curriculum for young adults between 18 and 25 years old. Young adults will come together to strengthen bonds, share experiences, and learn ways to develop sustainable, balanced lifestyles - all while honoring their heroes.



# Look to us, Look to Each Other

## CONNECTIONS

Small sharing groups offer gentle, supportive discussions. Some groups are topic-based, while others are reserved for specific relationships. Regardless of the topic or structure, these sessions are led by trained facilitators. The guiding principles for sharing groups include receptive sharing, listening and respectful peer support.

## MEN'S GRIEF – A BROTHERHOOD OF HEALING

Workshops designed by men, for men provide an opportunity to come together to explore the unique challenges of grieving and supporting when there isn't an easy fix.

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

As time goes on, the effects of grief can change. We often find that we have not only lost our loved ones; we may also have lost our sense of self. In this three-part workshop series designed for surviving women at least two years out from loss, we will use a variety of activities and discussion tools to explore the lessons of the past, identify where we are in the present, and step forward into the future with intention. Over the course of

the Seminar, a sisterhood will emerge, and we will leave Memorial Day weekend more empowered to live lives of meaning and joy.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

We are excited to bring you an expanded suite of programming designed to address how grief and emotional stress affect body and mind. Deep inside each of us is our Inner Warrior - the voice that urges us to keep trying, the fighter that chooses to get stronger every day. The TAPS Health and Wellness staff, collaborating with other experts in the field, invites you to workshops designed to help you resolve pain, build confidence, and lean into the difference between "good tired" and "grief tired."

## REFLECTIONS AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

If grief, trauma, or exhaustion seem to have wrung everything from you, you're not alone. Numbness, detachment, and fear for the future can feel overwhelming in early grief and persistent or surprising when we're farther along. It's not uncommon to feel a void - a spiritual or emotional blank space. Yet, there are many powerful ways to honor this emptiness through art, writing, music, meditation, and yoga (to name a

our national seminar, these sessions help you find creative release, guide you on your journey, and soothe your spirit.

## SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events in Washington, D.C. and Arlington, VA offer enriched ways to experience military traditions, remembrance ceremonies, musical and sporting events against the landscape of the nation's capital. Friday night special events include the Marine Corps Evening Parade, Nationals Baseball Game, and Moonlight Monuments Tour, as well as memorable opportunities closer to the hotel. On Monday, TAPS families are guests of honor at the National Memorial Day Observance at Arlington National Cemetery, and a limited number of slots are available for those who want to walk in the National Memorial Day Parade. Space for many of these activities is limited, so register early.

## SURVIVOR SANCTUARY

The Survivor Sanctuary, set aside as a quiet place for adults, is a retreat for sitting, reflecting, and processing-a space to take a break and draw apart for a time to renew your spirit and find balance. ★

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



# Beyond Borders

Bringing together the global community of survivors

**T**APS is an organization for all those who are grieving their military loved one. We are part of a family and part of a community, just as our loved ones shared a mission and common goal with like-minded individuals. They served side by side not only with their American battle buddies, but with militaries from around the world all striving to meet shared missions. Today, we have American troops in over 175 countries. We are defending freedom, bringing aid, keeping the peace, and ensuring a future that is safe and secure.

As survivors, we are now part of a global community of military grievers, speaking the universal language of love and loss, hope and healing. TAPS has wonderful partnerships with organizations like the India War Widows Association and the Israeli Defense Forces Widows and Orphans. We have held our bereaved brothers and sisters in Ukraine and Australia as they honored their heroes; we have marched to the Cenotaph in London with the British War Widows

as the Queen laid a wreath on Armistice Day, and we have created opportunity for the widows of the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga.

We transcend religious and cultural differences. We rise above politics. We join together in honor, remembrance, hope and love.

In July 2018, TAPS invited partner organizations from around the world to meet for an International Working Group of organizations for the loved ones of deceased military, and 27 countries participated, including representatives from India, Ukraine, Israel, England, Australia, Burma, Colombia, Turkey, Canada, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Nigeria.

With participation from the White House, Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, we came together to draft a joint declaration of our shared hope for all who are grieving their loved one:

BE IT KNOWN BY ALL, WE THE FAMILIES OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM, STAND TOGETHER IN THE LIGHT OF JUSTICE AGAINST ALL THOSE THREATENING THE PEACE OF OUR WORLD. WE UNITE WITH GREAT PURPOSE AND WITH PRIDE IN OUR HEROES' SELFLESS SERVICE.

WE PLEDGE TO CONTINUE AS THEIR LIVING LEGACIES IN HONOR OF THEIR SACRIFICE TO HEAL OUR HEARTS AND RAISE FUTURE GENERATIONS IN PEACE, FREEDOM, AND STABILITY.

THE FAMILIES OF OUR DECEASED MILITARY ARE HEREBY UNITED AS A GLOBAL COMMUNITY INTERDEPENDENT UPON ONE ANOTHER. WE COMMIT TO GO BEYOND OUR BORDERS, RISE ABOVE POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES, TRANSCEND LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND UNITE WITH ONE VOICE IN HOPE AND HEALING.

WE RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A SOLID AND SUSTAINED NETWORK OF SUPPORT AND TO MAXIMIZE RESOURCES OFFERED



KABUL, AFGHANISTAN



MOSUL, IRAQ





**DNIPRO, UKRAINE**

TO ALL WHO ARE GRIEVING THE DEATH OF A MILITARY LOVED ONE. WE STAND TOGETHER IN OUR ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF GRIEF, OUR RESPECT FOR ALL WHO HAVE SERVED AND DIED, AND OUR DEDICATION TO PEACE.

IN HONOR OF OUR FALLEN HEROES, OUR MILITARY DECEASED, AND OUR MARTYRS, WE WILL RAISE OUR VOICES AS ONE GLOBAL COMMUNITY, REPRESENTING THE FAMILIES OF ALL THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM.

FOR THE SUPPORT OF THIS DECLARATION, WE MUTUALLY PLEDGE TO EACH OTHER OUR HONOR FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED AND DIED AND OUR CARE FOR THEIR FAMILIES.

In October, TAPS was once again in Australia at the Invictus Games for an event with surviving families from around the world; in Turkey to meet with the Turkish Veterans and Families Association; in Amman, Jordan for the Transgenerational Trauma Conference; and in London for the TAPS NFL Experience.

If you are interested in learning more or joining TAPS for an upcoming trip, please email [global@taps.org](mailto:global@taps.org)! ☆

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



**SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA**



**LONDON, ENGLAND**



**KYIV, UKRAINE**



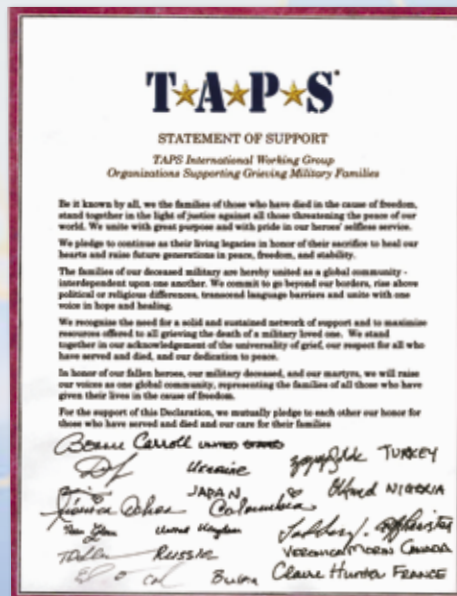
**TEL AVIV, ISRAEL**



**ANKARA, TURKEY**



**AMMAN, JORDAN**



**MANILA, PHILIPPINES**

# Camaraderie and Comfort

Gatherings close to home keep survivors connected

In small towns and big cities, at a coffee shop in a quiet room - the comfort and camaraderie of your TAPS family is right around the corner and close to home. Whether you want to talk about your grief and gain insight into how others are coping, share a casual visit or participate in an activity where you can enjoy the sights and sounds of nature - the love and care of TAPS is present where you live, work and play.

TAPS Togethers and Care Groups are relaxed, casual gatherings that encourage survivors to connect in their communities. The TAPS magic we experience when together - that atmosphere of being understood - becomes more accessible. Smaller groups, familiar surroundings, and the knowledge that your #TAPSfam is close by are the hallmarks of TAPS Togethers and Care Groups.

## TAPS Togethers

Every day experiences are made more meaningful when surrounded by those who care for us. We are able to stay in touch and spend time together. When gathered with fellow survivors, we can be open, honest and feel comfort that transcends words.

TAPS Togethers give us opportunities in social settings to maintain contact with

those who are traveling the grief journey and to foster a deeper appreciation for the individuals that have been brought into our lives.

This year, survivors have enjoyed a Super Bowl party at TAPS National Headquarters, snowshoeing classes in Denver, touring the Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, makeover classes at Sephora, and private classes at an Apple store. Our good friends at Starbucks have welcomed survivors with open arms, providing gift cards to support TAPS families coming together for coffee hours.

TAPS Togethers are different from care groups or support group sessions because they often center around an activity or occur in social settings. Discussing your grief experience is an option, not a requirement. Relaxing among friends will help you gain a stronger support network.

You can play an active role in helping TAPS expand our outreach through TAPS Togethers. Think of an activity in your area that would be affordable to do (get a local restaurant to sponsor a meal, ask a local museum to donate free admission for surviving families, see if a venue will donate tickets to a show or send us a proposal if there's a cost associated, and we'll do our best to find a sponsor for you!). Contact [communityrelations@taps.org](mailto:communityrelations@taps.org) to share your



ideas and we will work with you to bring TAPS love to your community.

Simple, comforting and energizing - the gift of time spent with your TAPS family waits for you at our TAPS Togethers.

## Care Groups

If a more structured support group format appeals to you, TAPS Care Groups provide safe spaces for honest discussions focused on grief, loss, and connection. In most cases, Care Groups are lead by a TAPS Peer Mentor and a mental health professional. These gatherings are not therapy but they are therapeutic, allowing survivors to



## TAPS Togethers >

Continue to check your email and [taps.org](http://taps.org) for upcoming opportunities. If you're a TAPS Peer Mentor interested in helping facilitate a gathering, please email [communityrelations@taps.org](mailto:communityrelations@taps.org).



explore all the emotions associated with grief and their own journey while in the supportive company of others.

Each group meets at a safe, easy to find location and is free to attend. Some groups offer childcare so you can have peace of mind knowing your children are being looked after while you attend. Discussions help you share precious memories, share the challenges of grief and create lasting bonds that will touch your heart.

Gentle guidance from facilitators helps survivors weave together the common threads of military service, grief, and coping skills. Regular meetings and familiar faces help build community and ease the pain of loss.

Visit our website at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) to see if a group is currently meeting near you and plan to attend.

**Care and Support – Close to Home**  
Whether it's an evening at a ball game, a discussion group, an afternoon picnic by the lake, a group bike ride or Sunday brunch your TAPS family is never far away. Whenever we gather together, we find profound comfort and a community we know will be forever present with support and love.

As we approach the holiday season and look to the New Year, we hope to see you at one or more of our many family gatherings.

Our national and regional seminars bring us together during the year. Between those times, we can stay connected in our towns and neighborhoods. TAPS is here for all the days, nights, weekends, and moments that make up your new and unexpected life. Spending them with fellow survivors brings strength as we move forward. It is a special gift we can unwrap any time of year. Join us as we share this journey – Together. ★



PHOTOS: TAPS PEER MENTORS

## TAPS Care Groups >

Interested in starting a TAPS Care Group in your area?  
Contact [caregroups@taps.org](mailto:caregroups@taps.org) or call us at (800) 959-TAPS (8277)\*  
\*MUST BE A TAPS PEER MENTOR TO FACILITATE A CARE GROUP. CONTACT US TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN BECOME A PEER MENTOR.

# TAPS Online Store

[taps.org/shop](https://taps.org/shop)

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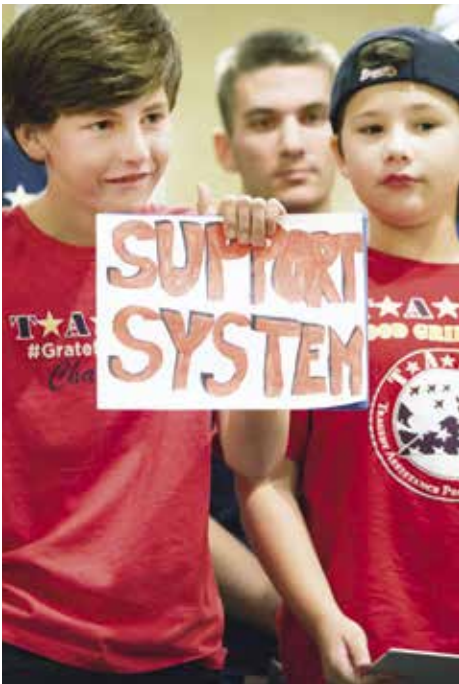
1. TAPS Baby Onesie – \$15
2. Ornament - Folded Flag – \$20
3. Ornament - Wreath – \$20
4. Women's Zip Up Jacket – \$60
5. Klinger Gift Set – \$20
6. Fleece Ear Warmer – \$10
7. Leather Keychain – \$8
8. Youth Grey Long Sleeve Tee – \$20
9. Klinger Toddler T – \$15
10. Grunt Style Red TAPS Logo Tee – \$25
11. Youth Angels Pink Glitter Tee – \$15
12. Angels Pink Glitter Tee – \$15

*Right Page:*

13. Lapis Post Earrings and Heart Necklace Set – \$68
14. Lapis with Silver Bezel Earrings – \$42
15. Silver Bezel Earrings and Charm Necklace Set – \$60
16. Lapis Healing Hearts – \$20
17. Round Lapis Post Earrings – \$32
18. Lapis Bracelet with 20k Gold Charms Set – \$80
19. Afghan Bracelet with TAPS Charm and Bead – \$80
20. Afghan Beaded Bracelet – \$40
- Golden Globe Stretch Bracelet – \$32

# We Are Here *for You!*

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to all those grieving the death of a military loved one. This at-a-glance guide outlines some of the ways TAPS provides compassionate care.



## **National Military Survivor Helpline**

Grief doesn't follow a schedule, and often some of the loneliest moments come at night or on weekends, holidays or even in the middle of a busy day. Continuously operational since 1994, our Helpline consists of a network of trained peer professionals who are on call for you 24/7/365 at 800-959-TAPS (8277), whether you are in emotional crisis, need to connect with TAPS resources and programs, or just want to remind yourself that you are part of a loving, supportive family.

## **Peer Mentor Network**

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program ensures you'll never walk alone. We equip survivors who are at least 18 months past their loss to serve as mentors to fellow survivors looking for someone who truly

understands. They are there to listen when you need someone to talk to, be a friend when you're feeling lonely, and celebrate the triumphs in your grief journey. Knowing you are not alone, you can find validation and ultimately a sense of hopefulness with your peers. Find out more: [taps.org/peermentors](https://taps.org/peermentors).

## **Casework Assistance**

In the midst of emotional exhaustion, many of the bereaved are surprised by the complexity of managing benefits, paperwork, and the loose ends that require attention. We work closely with trusted partners to find and use as many resources as possible that fit your needs. Close relationships with government agencies and service branches help us resolve issues regarding burials, benefits, eligibility, records, and more, while a network of

other organizations consult regularly on everything from health care and insurance issues to financial hardship and credit counseling. Find out more: [taps.org/casework](https://taps.org/casework).

## **Connections to Grief Counseling**

TAPS provides connections to free and unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources, and local area support groups. Individual grief counseling is important to many survivors. Sitting one-on-one with a skilled therapist who understands grief and trauma can help you work through some of the most painful parts of your loss. Finding the best fit is important, and we can help. The right grief counselor can help you discover strengths, develop your own coping skills, and help you work through questions, changes in relationships, and secondary losses. Find out more: [taps.org/griefcounseling](https://taps.org/griefcounseling).

### Education Support Services

TAPS serves as a guide to scholarship information and benefits resources for military survivors. We work with you to align resources with your goals; help you communicate with schools, college, and universities; and support you in going confidently into the next phase of your life. Your education is part of your loved one's legacy for you—and we want you to grow into it with as much peace of mind as possible. Find out more: [taps.org/edu](http://taps.org/edu).

### Suicide Loss Support

A death by suicide can leave behind a wake of emotions that complicate an

already painful grieving process—and wherever you are in the country or the world. Whether you want to share your story or just read how other survivors are coping, our online grief support community is a way for you to develop and strengthen your connections with your TAPS family from the comfort of your home. As a gathering place for survivors, the TAPS Online Community hosts chat sessions for real-time conversations, message boards that provide space for questions and comments, a blog, and peer-based sharing groups to drive conversation and connection. Find out more: [taps.org/onlinecommunity](http://taps.org/onlinecommunity).

grow and heal with a little more confidence. Our events bring surviving family members together for sharing, growth, and healing. TAPS events take place all over the country each year. Opportunities for connection include: national and regional survivor seminars; TAPS Togethers, casual one-day events in your local community; health and wellness retreats, empowerment programs and expeditions; and sports and entertainment experiences.

### Youth Programs

Though their lives are marked by grief, young survivors at TAPS know their



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

already painful grieving process. Many of us ask, “Why did this happen?” We worry that our loved ones will be remembered for how they died instead of how they lived and served. Suicide loss survivors can be assured that they have a safe space within TAPS to remember, honor, and grieve their loved one's entire story. Special TAPS programming and resources, including the annual National Military Suicide Survivors Seminar, provide gentle, understanding support as we work through the emotions associated with this type of loss. We have walked in your shoes and are here to offer comfort and care. Find out more: [taps.org/suicide](http://taps.org/suicide).

### TAPS Online Community

The TAPS online grief support groups are here for you wherever you are in the

**Publications**  
TAPS has created a series of pocket-size guides—including *Survivor Guide*, *Benefits and Finances*, *Education Support Services*, *Children's Grief*, *Grief Guide*, and *Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss*—that are available at no cost to survivors and supported by experts in the field. Other resources include *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., and the children's book *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope*. Find out more: [taps.org/publications](http://taps.org/publications).

### TAPS Events

The grief journey takes you out of your comfort zone. But when you see that others share this journey, you can find new ways to

lives will also be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure, and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs—which include Good Grief Camps at TAPS seminars, summer campouts, teen adventures, and family retreats—provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing. Find out more: [taps.org/youthprograms](http://taps.org/youthprograms). ★

To learn more about the support waiting for you from your TAPS family, visit our website at [taps.org](http://taps.org) or call the Helpline anytime at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

# Spotlight on Service

Bethany Sutherland Jones



By Sharon Paz, TAPS Volunteer Coordinator

When Bethany Jones first volunteered with TAPS, it was crystal clear that service was a quality deeply ingrained in her identity.

Bethany had the benefit of seeing service to country modeled by her parents growing-up as an Air Force daughter. That service was echoed when later she became an Air Force wife and mother. Over the many years of moving from one duty assignment to another, Bethany has viewed each move as an opportunity to re-invent herself, and it's no surprise that most of the work that she had engaged in has an element of service to it. Whether it was customer service in her faux finishing business, serving the public as a middle-school teacher, or her 9-year private practice as a massage therapist, she felt strongly about a one-to-one connection that comes with serving others.

Living in the Washington D.C. area, Bethany first connected with TAPS as she participated in the Wreaths Across America event at Arlington National Cemetery last year. When she saw the TAPS volunteer call to action for wreath clean-up efforts in January, she thought it would be a good way to see the full circle of their annual program. And with her two boys home for the holidays, the entire family was able to help with both the laying down and the

picking-up of wreaths. Lending a hand to honor the fallen in this simple way, Bethany said she “felt it important and significant because of the location.” She admitted that before the clean-up, she had never heard of TAPS, but after receiving a hand-written thank-you note with information about the mission and future volunteer opportunities, Bethany decided she wanted to serve more. We're so glad that she did.

As TAPS moved our headquarters in February of this year, three floors down from the office we had occupied for the previous five years, we not only gained square footage, but we also recognized the need for a new volunteer role. Thus the guest liaison volunteer emerged. As the first face of TAPS headquarters, guest liaisons warmly welcome visitors and honor all of the military families, survivors, donors, partners, and guests who visit TAPS. From greeting all arrivals, the guest liaisons also help with other administrative tasks, special events, and program project support.

As one of the first to take on this new role, Bethany has been an exceptional volunteer from the very start. Sharon Paz, Manager of Volunteer Resources, says that, “Bethany’s poise, professionalism, and genuine friendliness are a credit to her outstanding character. She’s a joy to work with, and I’m sure to smile every week when she’s comes to volunteer with us.”

Bethany shines as a guest liaison, and she shared with us that the position has provided her with “the opportunity to meet strong, caring and compassionate” people, and she enjoys the connection that comes with working with others who are passionate about the TAPS mission. From the fellow volunteers to the staff, Bethany feels “a positive, upbeat energy at headquarters that is contagious.” Other

that Bethany has provided TAPS includes assisting with the media at the Honor Guard Gala, preparing monthly anniversary cards for survivors, doing research in support of regional seminars, and transcribing data from Good Grief Camps.

Though she volunteers every week in the headquarters, Bethany will tell you that the one engagement that really made an impact was when she helped with pack-out for the Good Grief Camp after this year’s National Military Survivor Seminar. She paid us the ultimate compliment of telling us that her experience volunteering with TAPS, “just reinforced that (she) chose the right organization to volunteer for.” Bethany says that she was moved by the enormity of the nationals. “It was a beautiful event, and it was powerful to see all of the families,” she recalls. Bethany said that she was amazed by the connections she was seeing between all of the survivors attending. “I couldn’t walk through the foyer or lobby without getting chills at how powerful the work was to all the attendees and see their profound gratitude.” Seeing survivors at the end of the weekend all dressed in red, hugging, smiling, and interacting with one another Bethany says was like a family reunion.

We’re honored that Bethany has become part of the TAPS volunteer family, and we thank her wholeheartedly for her generous service! ✪

## Volunteer with TAPS ➤

Visit [taps.org/volunteer](https://taps.org/volunteer) to discover the opportunities available for you to join our mission and have an impact on the lives of grieving military families. You can also call the Helpline at 800-959-TAPS (8277) and ask for Volunteer Resources.



# Join Your TAPS Family

## 2019 Regional and National Military Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps

### MARCH

Texas Regional Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp  
March 15-17  
*Fort Hood, TX*

### MAY

25th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp  
May 24-27  
*Washington, DC*

### AUGUST

Ohio Regional Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp  
August 2-4  
*Cleveland, OH*

### APRIL

Colorado Regional Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp  
April 5-7  
*Colorado Springs, CO*

### JULY

California Regional Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp  
July 12-14  
*Los Angeles, CA*

### SEPTEMBER

Florida Regional Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp  
September 13-15  
*Jacksonville, FL*

### OCTOBER

11th Annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp  
October 11-14  
*Phoenix, AZ*



# Shopping and *Shakespeare*

## Special friends helping create holiday memories

By Leigh Edmonds | Manager, Sports & Entertainment

Over the last several years, TAPS has developed amazing relationships through our Sports and Entertainment program providing families with opportunities to honor their heroes and create new memories. Teams and individual players from the NFL, NBA, Major League Baseball and NCAA have created memorable experiences for TAPS families and they step up even more during the holiday season, bringing joy during what can be a difficult time of year.

In December of 2014, Patrick DiMarco and the Atlanta Falcons Community Relations team hosted a party at a Walmart outside of Atlanta featuring dinner, games, pictures with Santa, presents and an opportunity for surviving children to go shopping with a Falcons player to spend \$250 however they wanted. The aisles at Walmart were filled with TAPS kids picking out items for themselves, their siblings and for most of them, their mothers. Many took the opportunity to buy something for mom,

primarily because dad was no longer around to shower her with presents. One child spent all of his money on his mom, only to have the player shopping with him offer encouragement to pick out something for himself as well. Kids roamed the store, trying to find the perfect gift. They bought footballs, dollhouses, sporting equipment and clothing. Other shoppers looked on as players pushed shopping carts filled with holiday cheer. They were awestruck by the players and as they asked about the kids in red shirts, they came to discover the true heroes were those kids learning to enjoy the holidays without their fathers.

Two years later, Brigham Young University reached out to teams4taps with the hopes of creating a special evening for nearly 30 local family members who's loved one had a connection to the university. They sent vans and delivered everyone to the university where a catered meal awaited. At the conclusion of dinner, they were all given gift bags filled with BYU swag

and then were escorted to the Men's Basketball Game. At half time, their loved ones were honored as their bios were read and the camera showed the families on the jumbotron. At the end of the game, family members got their pictures taken with Mitt Romney and got to meet each player of the team as they came out and signed posters, swag and spent time talking with each survivor. While the game was being played, the university staff had collected personal information about the families from TAPS and then they went shopping, and enlisted elves to help wrap presents. At the end of the evening, families were led to a room where the presents for each family member were waiting. Children received shoes, games, basketballs, alumni got university swag, and an engaged couple received a set of pots and pans. Every gift was individualized and a complete surprise. The evening reminded these families they have a community that supports and cares for them.

Josh Richardson of the NBA's Miami Heat, reached out to TAPS in 2017 wanting to provide a special Christmas experience for TAPS families living in southern Florida. Josh was raised in a family who believed in service. His father is a retired Oklahoma City firefighter and his mother a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force Reserves and an ordained Baptist minister. He said he was "...excited to meet the families...and take the kids shopping for the holidays. These families lost loved ones who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country and are true heroes. Me and my family are forever grateful for their service and look forward to enjoying a special few days together during the holidays."



Josh and his family, along with four TAPS families arrived at Dick's Sporting Goods, and each family received Miami Heat goodies and a chance for photos with Josh. After Josh shared why he wanted to support military surviving families, he gave each child a gift card and sent them out into the store to shop. The first stop for everyone was the shoe department, as it was very important to Josh and his family to make sure that each child received a good pair of shoes. Then the fun really began. Josh could be seen around the store playing basketball with the younger kids, serving as a human hoop for them to dunk. He also played catch with a couple of young ladies who had purchased new softball gear and even kicked around a soccer ball with another child. The following evening, each family were Josh's special guests at a Miami Heat game sitting courtside during warm-ups and taking group photos at center court. The joy reflected on each child's face made it clear that Josh had truly made a meaningful impact and had fans for life.

In that same year, the Detroit Lions wanted to offer holiday help to those from the TAPS community who were struggling emotionally and also facing tough times financially. They brought families together for a fun afternoon of gaming and activities at a private gathering at Dave & Buster's and then surprised families with gift cards, team gift baskets, Lions' gear and other goodies. Players like Lions' tight end Eric Ebron and wide receiver Golden Tate could be seen competing in basketball, skeeball and other interactive games with TAPS kids. Laughter and joy filled the room. As families left the event and hugged the players, they were leaving with their arms full of holiday goodies and hearts full of hope.

Nationals Winterfest has become an annual and much anticipated holiday tradition for TAPS families living in the Washington, DC area courtesy of our friends at Guidehouse (formerly PricewaterhouseCoopers) and the Washington Nationals. This interactive baseball themed holiday festival is a great opportunity for families to celebrate their love of baseball and the holidays. This event could not have come at a better time



in December 2017. On Saturday the 16th, many TAPS families spent their morning at Arlington Cemetery for the annual Wreaths Across America gathering, laying holiday wreaths on the graves of their fallen heroes. That afternoon, many of the same families came together at Winterfest, participating in activities and meeting their favorite Washington Nationals players. It was a day of remembrance, honor, and celebration of their heroes.

The theater community both in Washington, DC and Omaha, Nebraska has also been very supportive during the holidays. The Orpheum Theatre in Omaha included TAPS families in their 2016 'Heroes Night', recognizing their service and sacrifice in a special ceremony before that night's production of the award winning musical *White Christmas*. The Shakespeare Theatre Company of Washington, DC has invited TAPS families for several seasons to take part in Winter Revels, a holiday themed festival, followed by performances of shows like Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and the musical *The Secret Garden*.

For the family of United States Army Major William J. Bainbridge, IV it's been an especially meaningful experience. As shared by surviving spouse Maggie, "Bill loved the theatre and tried to encourage a similar love with Matthew and Elizabeth. Most of all, Bill enjoyed taking the kids to see Shakespeare.

"The first Christmas holiday after Bill died, TAPS invited us to see the Shakespeare Theatre Company perform *The Secret Garden*. After the amazing performance, we were able to meet the cast, make ornaments, watch a magician and eat delicious food. At the production of *Twelfth Night*, one of the crafts was making wreaths from dried flowers. The kids and I all made one and for the next three visits to Arlington, we would leave one of the wreaths at Bill's grave. We are so thankful to TAPS and the Shakespeare Theatre Company. Everyone we met was lovely. The staff and cast asked about Bill and the kids loved sharing their memories of going to the theatre with their dad. Both performances were extraordinary and we are so thankful to have been invited. We now have more happy memories of the theatre to add to the ones we have with Bill."

TAPS Sports & Entertainment seeks to create meaningful opportunities with the sport, team, player or aspect of the entertainment industry that used to bring a smile to the face of a family's hero or that has been a source of healing to them in the absence of their loved one. We are so grateful to our friends in the sports and entertainment world for wanting to bring holiday joy to our families during the time of year that their loved one's absence can be the most poignant. As we approach another holiday season, we look forward to new opportunities to provide hope and support to our survivors in partnership with our friends in sports and entertainment. ★

# Support *the Mission*, Honor *the Legacy*

The TAPS National Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia is America's home for the families of our nation's fallen heroes. TAPS is proud to announce a special way to honor all those we love and raise funds to support the critical services TAPS provides to all who are grieving a military loved one.

## Remembrance: \$100

Remember your loved one with this 4" x 5" tile.



## Tribute: \$250

Create a tribute to your loved one with 8" x 5" tile.



## Salute: \$1000

Salute your loved one with this 8" x 10" tile.



## Hero: \$2500

Honor your loved one with this 16" x 10" tile.

*\* Personalize these tiles with a picture and an inscription .*



**100% OF YOUR DONATION SUPPORTS  
TAPS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

*Space is limited*  
**Visit [taps.org/tribute](http://taps.org/tribute) today!**

**ARTIST'S VIEW OF THE ENTRY** to our National Headquarters where your hero tile will be proudly displayed.



# Thankful Hearts

*You are my security blanket  
and my safety net.*

*Thank you for providing us with a loving and safe place to  
remember the life and legacy of our loved ones.*

*A big THANK YOU to everyone at TAPS!  
You all have made my journey bearable.*

*I love phone calls from TAPS. They always mean love is on  
the other end of the line and that special things are in store.*

*TAPS has done so much to nourish my soul.*

*The online chats are my lifeline.  
I am very grateful for my online chat buddies.*

*You are our ROCK. Thank you TAPS!*

*I know that they (TAPS) are there for me  
24/7 to listen, talk, and support me.*

*My relationship with my Peer Mentor has been  
most significant in my personal grief journey.*

*We are blessed beyond measure to get such  
outpouring of love and compassion in one place.*

*Thank you for reminding us that  
there are those who care deeply  
for us and our loved ones.*

*TAPS saved my life!*



# We are Grateful for our Sponsors



**DYNCORP INTERNATIONAL:** In 2014, DynCorp International and TAPS entered into a formal Memorandum of Agreement to provide support for the families of DynCorp's fallen personnel who died while defending our nation's military objectives. Recently, TAPS was in Texas with DynCorp meeting with employees and being honored at their Journey of Hope Golf Tournament.

**USAA:** USAA employees made hundreds of Hero Bears and Capes for our TAPS Good Grief Campers and brought smiles to the faces of our youngest survivors.



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



**NFL:** The NFL sponsored our first TAPS Legacy Mentor Experience in New York. The four days of meetings and tours included a roundtable discussion with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell.

**NYLF:** New York Life Foundation supports our Military Mentors, Good Grief Camps and TAPS Families at our two National Seminars. We are so grateful for their support and their enthusiastic employee-volunteers.

**OSHKOSH:** Oshkosh Defense posted a TAPSHero Wall at the AUSA Convention. For every signature Oshkosh donated \$10 to TAPS!



**HARTWELL FOUNDATION:** TAPS Families enjoy Victory Ranch thanks to our friends at The Hartwell Foundation, who sponsor our Regional Good Grief Camps, Family Camps and Campouts.



800-959-TAPS (8277) ★TAPS.org

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors offers comfort, care, and resources to all those grieving the death of a military loved one.



**TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS**

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*Your TAPS Family is always by your side.  
With love and pride, we travel this journey together.  
Sending our thoughts and care to you this holiday season.*

