

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS



VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 1

TRICARE TALK



Presented By TriWest Healthcare Alliance



TRICARE Coverage for Surviving Spouses

Have questions about continued eligibility for TRICARE benefits? Here's how it works:

Surviving Spouse Coverage Continues

"Transitional survivor" benefits continue for three years after the sponsor's death, with the same coverage and costs as active duty family members (ADFM). TRICARE Prime, Extra and Standard options continue after the three-year mark at the same level as military retirees.

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- ★ Calling 1-800-538-9552 or 1-866-363-2883 (TTY/TDD)
- ★ Faxing address changes to DEERS at 1-831-665-8317
- ★ Mailing address changes to the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office,
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Dedicated West Region TAPS Liaison Available

Did you know that TriWest has a dedicated TAPS Liaison available to assist TAPS families in the TRICARE West Region? This is in addition to the customer service provided through our toll-free 1-888-TRIWEST line. If you need assistance with a unique or ongoing TRICARE issue, we invite you to contact our TriWest TAPS Liaison at 1-800-871-5079, extension 42191.

Proud Supporter of TAPS

TriWest Healthcare Alliance is proud to partner with the Department of Defense to provide access to cost-effective, high-quality health care for 2.9 million members of America's military family in the 21-state TRICARE West Region. We're equally proud of our affiliation with TAPS and its mission through support of the annual Memorial Day Survivor Seminar and regional camps held throughout the TRICARE West Region.



SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE

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VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 1

The TAPS Magazine is published quarterly and mailed free of charge to survivors, their friends and family, service members, and professionals who work with military survivors such as chaplains, casualty and mortuary staffs, family support, commanders and their spouses, medical and mental health professionals, funeral directors, and victim advocates.

In accord with its goal of compassionate care, TAPS seeks articles that reflect the theme: Remembering the Love, Celebrating the Life, Sharing the Journey. Submissions will be considered based on their promotion of hope and healing. Authors should avoid topics that are political, partisan, or exclusive to their own personal situation.

To submit an article or request permission to reprint a previously published article, please email info@taps.org.

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“Each of these heroes stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live and grow and increase in its blessings.”



- Franklin Delano Roosevelt -



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!
800-959-TAPS

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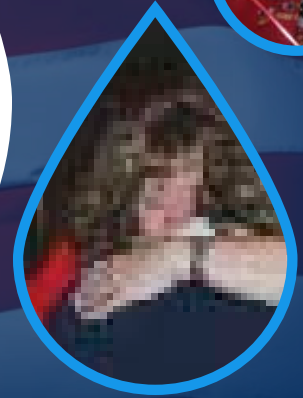
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Tears

By Christine McNeill-Matteson

© 1985

Round
And
Warm
Falling softly with
emotions. To come with plenty,
only to quickly go away. The taste is
as salty as the sea; the nature as unpredictable,
understood only by you. It is not your duty
to carry the burden, nor your light of joy.
Moist blessings to each of us...
You are important,
My
Tears...




TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS



TAPS Magazine is dedicated to the brave men and women of our armed forces who laid their lives on the line and made the ultimate sacrifice in service to America. The quarterly magazine is written by and for surviving family members and friends. It is our hope that you will find comfort and connection in these pages as you continue your journey of grief.

TAPS is here for you.



“Remember the Love,  Celebrate the Life, Share the Journey” 



14th Annual National Military Survivors Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Registration

Register online at
www.taps.org
or call
800-959-TAPS!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Memorial Day Weekend
May 23 to 26, 2008
Washington, DC
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

For additional information, call or email
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
910 17th Street, NW Suite 800
Washington, DC 20006
800-959-TAPS (8277)
info@taps.org ★ www.taps.org





JOIN TEAM TAPS

Run to honor those we love!

October 26th, 2008

Participate in the spirit of honor, the spirit of courage and the spirit of love.

For more info:

Call 800-959-TAPS or visit us at www.taps.org



“TAPS has been extremely beneficial to us since my husband was killed in Iraq. Running this marathon in his honor and in support of TAPS is an opportunity for me to contribute to the cause that has helped so many families like mine.”

Dawn Rowe, Widow of Captain Alan Rowe, USMC



Marine Corps Marathon



T★A★P★S Regional Seminars

Photos from Fort Carson, Camp Pendleton and Fort Hood



Regional Seminars

- Alabama
 - Camp Lejeune
 - Camp Pendleton
 - Chicago
 - Fort Bliss
 - Fort Bragg
 - Fort Campbell
 - Fort Carson
 - Fort Drum
 - Fort Hood
 - Fort Lewis
 - Fort Richardson
 - Fort Stewart
 - Honolulu
 - Indiana
 - Lansing
 - New York
 - Ohio
 - Philadelphia
 - TAPS Parents Retreat
 - TAPS Seminar for Defense Contractor and USG Civilians
 - TAPS Sibling Retreat
 - TAPS Surviving Spouses Retreat
- ★ Please visit [TAPS online](http://TAPS.org) for more information.

“

“The TAPS Seminar at Fort Hood felt like coming home to a family that understood me, accepted me and loved me unconditionally. My daughter met other kids who stay in touch her with now, and we feel connected! We can't wait to see everyone again. Thank you, TAPS!”

“What a life changing day -- I cried and laughed and learned, all at once, and made new friends who I know I'll have for life. When is the next Seminar at Camp Pendleton?”

“I wasn't sure how it would go, being a Dad and attending a grief group, but it was actually the first time I didn't feel like I had to hold back. Being there on Fort Carson, with the support of the commanders and the soldiers, and with other fathers was just great. It was a safe place to be.”

”



WWW.TAPS.ORG

A Different Path

By Randy Beard

Why is it that human beings, when faced with the unknowable, develop expectations of how it is going to be? I really had no idea what my journey of grief was going to be like, but that didn't stop me from developing unfounded expectations. Of course not! The problem with those expectations is that they added extra stress to my already burdened soul. Not only did I experience the grief, but I also experienced the failure of not meeting my ridiculous expectations... expectations that were not based on any foundation whatsoever, but just pulled out of thin air. Two of these recurring expectations were:

- ★ **"Oh, a few months and I'll be functioning like normal..." and**
- ★ **"My wife and I will be able to draw close and go through this grief in the same way."**

It's been three years since the death of our son, Army Specialist Bradley S. Beard, and I am still not functioning at what was my previous "normal." I have had to acknowledge that there must be a new "normal," and adjust to it. The second misconception, however, is the one that I want to address, in the hope that my experience will help you in this time of readjustment to your new reality.

Several months after Brad's death, my wife, Betsy, and I decided to get out of the house and experience nature. We drove to nearby Pilot Mountain in North Carolina to spend some time hiking its paths. During this hike I began to understand something about the differences in the way we grieve.

Upon our arrival we decided to hike the path labeled as "strenuous," and we set off on what the sign identified as a

three-hour trek. I, being the sensitive intelligent guy that I am, understood my wife's desire to spend some time alone after she said, "Why don't you go ahead and allow me some solitude?" I was concerned about her and although I went on ahead, I would wait and allow her to catch up to make sure that she was OK. I would wait just long enough for her to come into view, and watch her for a while before I continued on ahead. A few times during the hike I waited for her to catch up to me, and we would rest and talk for a few minutes before resuming our journey.

But it was during one of the times of watching that I noticed she was not traveling the same path I had taken. She would go around rock formations to the left where I had gone to the right; she would take the higher passage around a stand of trees where I had taken the lower passage. As I watched, it suddenly struck me that it was the same way with our journey of grief. Somehow, I had expected us to experience the same things at the same time in our journey of grieving for Brad. I had been frustrated when she was not experiencing thoughts and feelings that I was going through. At the same time, I was at a loss to understand many of the things that she was dealing with at any given time.

Suddenly, I understood that in the same way she was walking a different path during our hike through the woods, she was taking a different path in her grief. This knowledge has allowed me the freedom to take my journey and not get upset if we are not experiencing the same things. I have had to let go of the idea of us grieving in lock step, and allow Betsy the liberty to take her own path. I began to understand





Randy Beard is the surviving father of SPC Bradley S. Beard who was killed in Iraq on October 14, 2004. He is a TAPS Peer Mentor, husband of Betsy, and father of Staci.

that grieving is, in many ways, a lonely journey. We are isolated, and yet not alone. I have had to accept the idea that Betsy's path is not the "wrong" path simply because it is different from mine.

One of the best things we do for ourselves is to keep each other in sight. And when we come to the resting points, we allow ourselves to talk about the paths that we have individually been traveling. I have realized that we each had our own individual relationship with Brad and we will not travel the same exact path or experience the same feelings in the same time frame as we travel this journey.

One of the blessings of TAPS is that it is a safe place where those of us on this journey of grief can come together, sit down, and share our individual stories. We can listen to each other's journeys. Sometimes I am amazed at how someone else is able to put into words feelings that I have, but am unable to identify or understand. (I am, after all, a man and sometimes this emotional stuff is hard to articulate... I actually had to have my wife edit this piece for clarity and understandability). But by listening to others I am able to explore my own inner thoughts and feelings. It helps

to join a larger cross section of people, to get ideas of what worked or didn't work for them. And every once in a while I find someone whose path has been very similar to mine.

The TAPS Survivor Seminar in Washington, DC is a place to join with others in honoring our loved ones on Memorial Day. We can come together in a safe environment and participate with others who understand. We can share our individual journeys. We can connect with each other, even when we are not experiencing identical grief. Please join us this May as we "Remember the love, Celebrate the life, Share the journey" together. *

Register online at www.TAPS.org or call 1-800-959-TAPS to join us for TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar on May 23-26, 2008!

This is a very special gathering at which we remember the love we have in our hearts, celebrate the life we were so blessed to know, and share our journey of grief so that we may lessen our heartache and pain.





Give an Hour is a nonpolitical nonprofit organization whose current project focuses on the mental health needs of our U.S. troops and families who are being affected by the current military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Give an Hour teams with mental health professionals nationwide who literally give an hour of their time each week to provide free mental health services to military personnel and their families.

Our Philosophy

Our definition of “family” is quite broad and includes, but is not limited to, the following: spouses, children, parents, siblings, extended family members, and unmarried partners. We are offering our services to anyone who has been affected directly or indirectly (through a relationship with someone in the military) by the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Visitors who seek services from Give an Hour may benefit from different types of support or treatment. We believe that most of you affected by these conflicts would not need mental health services if not for the unusual and extreme circumstances in which you find yourselves. Furthermore, many of you seeking services may not be familiar with counseling or psychotherapy. Therefore, we include some information to assist you, such as how to choose the right provider and what you should expect from mental health support or treatment.

While the standard within the mental health community is to meet with the client in the practitioner’s office, we recognize that this may not be feasible for some of you seeking services from our Returning Heroes Counseling Network. We encourage the use of

telephone support in those situations where you are unable to meet in person with the therapist or counselor. We understand that therapists and

Our Services

The following services are offered by our providers:

- **Individual Counseling/Therapy**
- **Bereavement and Loss**
- **Marital Counseling**
- **Traumatic Brain Injury**
- **Family Counseling/Therapy**
- **Group Counseling**
- **Child Evaluation and Treatment**
- **Parent Guidance**
- **Post-Traumatic Stress**
- **Substance Abuse Evaluation and Treatment**
- **Pastoral Counseling**
- **Spanish Speaking**



counselors will need to rely on their professional judgment to determine when such contact may be insufficient to meet your needs. Moreover, if you are unable to locate a provider in your area and do not feel comfortable with phone support, please contact us and we will attempt to locate a local provider for you.

We will soon be providing links to a variety of resources for military families, including articles that discuss the kinds of difficulties military families encounter and services available from national, state, and local organizations. We plan to have our Resource Library available to you later this summer. *

**For more information please visit us on the web at:
www.giveanhour.org**



My TAPS Experience

By: Cali Ravai Baldwin

Daughter of Claudia V. Baldwin and the late Joel Baldwin



When I found out I was going to the TAPS camp, I wasn't really excited. I was nervous about meeting other kids like me. I was afraid to talk about my feelings. I didn't like crying, or showing my feelings. I just bottled them up and pushed them deep down. A lot of times, I was bitter and angry. I didn't have friends that I would have visit at my house. At school recess, I didn't talk to anybody. I just stuck my head in a book, where I could get lost in my reading. Kids told me that I was stuck up because my daddy was killed in the war and that made me even angrier!!

When I went to the TAPS Good Grief Youth camp, I was so surprised! It felt good to tell other kids my stories, and know that they understood how I felt. There were times when I laughed, times when I cried, and times when I spoke openly about how I feel.

I was also given an awesome peer mentor, Lisa Reavor! We became really good friends right from the start! When I woke up in the morning, I was so excited about seeing Lisa. We had a really good time! I also met her boyfriend, Jeff, and his mentee. So we became a small group. Lisa and Jeff are awesome people! Lisa is sweet and down-to-earth. Jeff is fun and caring.

When I left TAPS, I had let some of those bottled up feelings out without showing anger or bitterness. I felt so refreshed, like a newly washed blanket! The activities were incredible, too! We wrote letters to our loved ones and sent them up towards Heaven with balloons. This was so important for me to do, especially with other children like me, who understand and feel so much of the pain, like I do. I enjoyed the arts and crafts, the monuments and areas we visited together, and especially the circus. I got to learn something new and found out that I could be good at it.

I love TAPS so much! I am going to come back every year! *

Inner Reflections & TAPS Impressions

By Claudia V. Baldwin, LMSW

Mother of Cali Ravai Baldwin and surviving wife of Navy Chief Joel E. Baldwin,
who was killed on December 21, 2004 in Mosul, Iraq

How do I Exist in a World Without You?

After the devastating, agonizing, and untimely death of my husband and soul-mate, Joel, I often wondered how my heart would continue to beat. I wondered how I would be able to find the strength to exist in a world that didn't include him. After his death I dreamed of ceasing to exist myself, not by choice or suicidal plan, but literally to cease - to stop breathing because something happened to Joel and he was no longer with me physically on this earth.

I was venturing in uncharted territory without hope of ever gaining a valid, reliable, navigational system. The questions were relentless... Why? How could this have happened? When will I ever... Was there a mistake?... Why, God, Why? Where are you? I tolerated excruciating, terrorizing, sleep deprived nights and exhausting, unfocused, numb, disconnected whirlwind-spinning days.

Somehow in the midst of this overwhelming roller coaster ride, my auto-pilot mode kicked in. After all, my daughter, Cali, needed me more than ever. My most important priority was her care and well-being. Ironically, I felt as if I was functioning out of a primitive sense of survival, yet on a false sense of wanting to. All the descriptives other people were using to describe me - strength, grace, confidence, determination, and perseverance - were unimaginable. They must have been describing someone else.

I often doubted myself; I felt like I should know better!! I was a seemingly intelligent woman. I was educated; I was a trained helper. I had worked with needy clients from all walks of life. I had witnessed so much pain, dysfunction, disequilibrium, discontent among the "walking wounded." I thought I knew what resources were out there for people in trauma. Now I was one of them.

As many of us who have been thrust on this painful journey and taken on the role of "survivor" have found - you heal at your own pace in ways you discover along the way. Every moment, every baby step in the journey to find healing is really, in essence... spontaneous, unvisited territory. There isn't a universal, magical cure or a specific ritual that is all-encompassing, medicinal, or stereotypical that will work across all generations or experiences or events to generate coping or healing.

I am not a devoutly religious person. However, I do consider myself deeply and richly spiritual - a person who reflects inwardly and outwardly, seeking refuge - peace, comfort, and support from an eternal source that surpasses human understanding in its totality.

I believe strongly that I was rescued and carried gently through these most turbulent moments in the journey of my life. I had lost courage to face the abyss of my future without my husband, Joel. He was my source of strength. He was my sense of safety, protection, comfort, love, hope, and

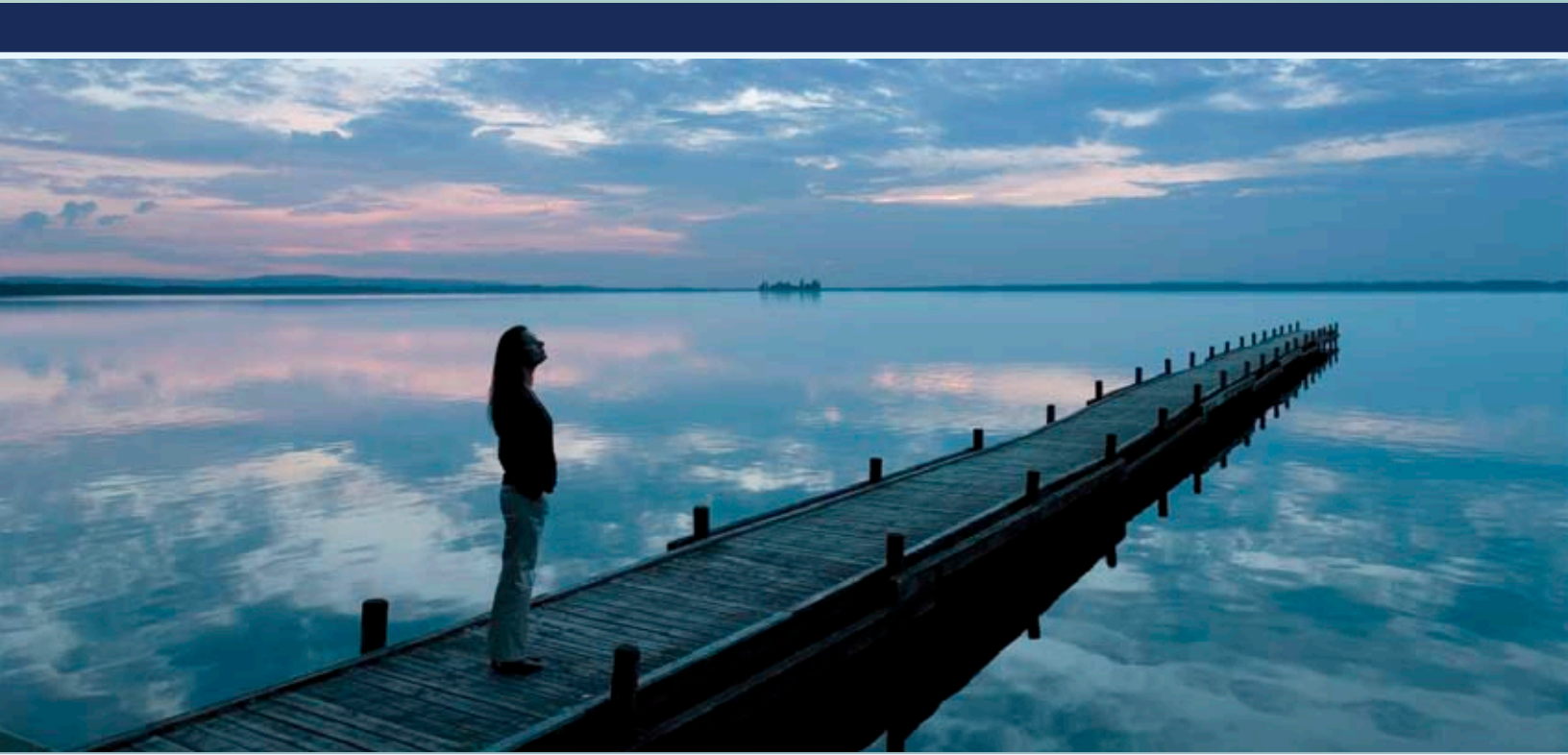
peace. He was the one person that I knew comprehended and practiced unconditional love and support. He was a remarkable, amazing, intelligent, skilled person. He was a peacemaker, a humanitarian, a lover of life and country, the daddy of our child, and my closest friend.

My determination for success fluttered. Yet, through the darkest hours and hours of uncertainty - I survived... tiny, unwavering steps were taken through the agony and feelings of emptiness that I often thought surely would take my life.



Seeds of Hope Planted

As a "resource queen" and a bleeding heart who has made a personal and spiritual vow to help others, I was at a loss on what, who, where, how, and when I would have any "real" hope to feel connected again, really be "strong," and feel able and skilled to return to my calling. But through my need for reading, research, exploring opportunities to help my daughter, and a need for socialization, I began to motivate myself to "get out of my shell." Seeds were planted and somehow they were generating hope and a renewed sense of awareness. I was identifying myself in a completely different manner. I was reborn - a new person on several dimensions; a person with an even thicker coat, ready to face and overcome life's obstacles. I also



wanted to establish new connections so that my daughter, Cali, and I could identify with and feel a part of another extended family.

Attending and participating at the TAPS National Survivor Seminar and the Peer Mentor training was an amazing experience! I felt "alive" again. I began to re-connect with the person I am and was meant to be. I met some incredible, remarkable people with so much to give and share. I made connections with others that I have high hopes will turn into long-lasting friendships. Somehow the TAPS seminar helped me gain a sense of equilibrium. I have always been thirsty for knowledge, and the workshops and speakers were a blessing. The program and the astounding selection of educational sessions and peer support were catalytic for me. But not only was I ministered to, I was given the opportunity to minister to others - give hugs, encouraging words, attentively listen, and care for others who share similar journeys. Serving others is a part of who I am and I was given the chance to use those gifts.

Hearing others openly and tearfully share about their journeys, their devastating losses, and how they are carrying on was inspirational, and heart-warming. I felt honored to share how they memorialize and celebrate the lives of their loved ones. I was moved to be among volunteers, including the children's mentors (many of whom were military) who strived above and beyond any call of duty. My little girl thrived in her Good Grief Youth Camp program! How could I not be humble and pleased?

TAPS was a gathering place for families, families who lost one of most significant components in their life; the life, love, laughter and companionship of their loved one. By no means did I leave there feeling empty. I was thrilled to have had the opportunity. Looking back I can't imagine why I felt uncertain or apprehensive. I know the power of love and togetherness. I recognized that in the people of TAPS and the many volunteers - in their faces their gestures, and abilities to extend so much of themselves to help others in need.

Since the seminar I feel as though I have regained my rhythm, my goal-oriented gait, my focus and purpose. My faith is beginning to restore itself. In my heart of hearts, my true belief in God prevailed. The awareness and understanding I have is limited AND I know I can still be "okay." I don't have to be "okay" everyday. I have accepted, through the help and support that TAPS provided, that I can and will do this.

Thank you for an amazing experience. I literally can't wait for the next one. Many of us are familiar with the popular saying that children (and we) often say, "Are we there yet?" That is what I hold onto mostly these days - a sense of hope and fulfillment, a stream of moments linked together in time that I whole-heartedly look forward to, TAPS.

Love and Laugh Profoundly and Embrace those you love often. *

Peer Mentor Profile

At the heart of TAPS' survivor support program are its Peer Mentors - survivors who have undergone special training and who are willing to offer loving support to other survivors more newly bereaved. Efforts are made to match new survivors with Peer Mentors whose losses are similar and ultimately wounded hearts find solace with other wounded hearts, even when circumstances differ. TAPS is grateful to its Peer Mentors, those special people who are willing to revisit their pain in order to help others cope with their own, and we are proud to introduce you to one of those special people in this profile.

★ ★ ★ Kim Ruocco ★ ★ ★

Kim's grief journey began in February 2005 with the suicide death of her husband, Marine Major John Ruocco, who had returned from Iraq the summer before. Recalls Kim, "The people who came to my house gave me a package of material. Along with everything else there was a letter to my casualty officer from a Colonel saying, 'If she does anything, if she remembers anything, she needs to hook up with this TAPS organization. It's the best-organized program of its kind that I've come across.' When I came out of my fog in the early summer, I called."

Of all their TAPS experiences, the most valuable for Kim and her two boys, ages 12 and 14, has been the National Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. "All my children had known was the military, so moving back to Massachusetts and losing that military connection was hard for them. Going to the TAPS program helped them with their grief but more importantly, reconnected them to the military and made them feel like they really belonged." Having been to the seminar two years in a row, Kim notes that her experience changed from the first year to the second. The first year she characterizes as a "big hug." Detailed explanations were irrelevant, as everyone understood one another's pain. She says, "I felt embraced and comforted. The second year was more



As a Peer Mentor, Kim has found that the benefit is two-way. Reaching out to others allows them to be supportive in return.

Thank You Kim!

about learning. I had a better sense of where I was in terms of my loss and where I wanted it to take me." For her children, staying in touch with their Good Grief Camp mentors has been an important part of their own coping.

Typical among survivors of suicide, Kim often wondered if she really fit in.

Since John's death was neither combat-related nor civilian, Kim found TAPS to be the one place that brought those two pieces of her loss together. In TAPS she found that the unique challenges of coping with suicide were honored and acknowledged. At the same time, she found a connection with other widows grieving the death of their husbands, regardless of circumstances of death.

Kim finds being a peer mentor both difficult and rewarding. The rawness of another's pain reminds her of her own but also serves as a yardstick to measure her own healing. In addition to her own experiences, Kim is able to draw on her training as a social worker.

"It would be easy to shut yourself in your house and just grieve, but at some point you have to step outside yourself and look around. Being a peer mentor has been very rewarding and it has helped me with my own grief. Programs like TAPS enable you to connect with others."

Much of Kim's life now revolves around her two children and their activities: hunting, fishing, water activities, snowboarding, and skiing. She still finds time to do oil painting, however, as she considers what she might do professionally in the future. "Right now I'm just trying to decide what I want to do next!" *

Miss Utah

Helping TAPS in the Long Haul

By Army Staff Sgt. Mary Flynn, National Guard Bureau

The 2007 Miss Utah is no stranger to the physical and mental discipline required to knock out 26.2 miles. She ran the Marine Corps Marathon here on Oct. 28, finishing in about 3.5 hours.

It's the third marathon she's run since winning the pageant title in June. "I love challenges," she said. "That's why I joined the military."

No, that's not a misprint. For one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer, Miss Utah becomes Army Sgt. Jill Stevens of the Utah National Guard. She trades in her high heels and gown for combat boots and combat uniforms, her bouquet of roses for a combat medic aid bag, and her sparkling tiara for a beret or patrol cap.

Wearing the uniform, she said, feels more natural to her. "I'm first-off a soldier, always," said Stevens, who had originally laughed at the idea of participating in a pageant. "I don't do heels. I didn't even know where to buy them!"

Having deployed as a combat medic with 1st Battalion, 211th Aviation Group, in April 2004 to Afghanistan, Steven's lifestyle isn't what one would expect of the typical pageant winner. The 25-year-old previously shared the same opinion of pageant contestants that many people hold. "I thought that all these girls do is wave their hand, look pretty and do nothing," she said. "I didn't want to be associated with that."

She soon discovered, however, that the organization actually had a lot in common with the military. The Miss America program promotes education and teaches leadership, she said. It also promotes fitness and well-being, while focusing on bringing out one's best.

"I saw a great opportunity that would open doors," she said, referring to the titleholder's position as a chance to start organizations or pass bills to create change. "[These women] can move people to action and really make a difference."



One way Stevens has chosen to make a difference is by raising funds and awareness for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing a support network for families of those who have died in service. TAPS offers peer support and assists survivors through a wide variety of programs, including programs for youths.

"[I'm running] for my battle buddies and their families, people who have lost loved ones over there," she said.

While in Washington for the marathon, Stevens met with families and visited soldiers recuperating at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. "I thought of them

along this run," she said. "I'm doing this for them."

Stevens said she intends to participate in more marathons before her reign as Miss Utah is over. In each one, she will run for TAPS.

Stevens was first exposed to the National Guard when recruiters set up a booth in her high school. Beyond the tuition assistance and hands-on medical experience she would receive as a combat medic, she said she was drawn to the challenge that being a soldier presented. "I wondered, 'Can I hack that?'" she recalled.

Today, the recent graduate of Southern Utah University has a bachelor's degree in nursing, 12 marathons under her belt, six years as a combat medic in the Utah National Guard, and she's just applied for a direct commission to become an Army nurse.

Stevens said she attributes much of her success to her experiences in the Guard.

"The military has really, truly provided me with a lot of opportunity" in addition to teaching her to make the best of a difficult situation, she said. "I turned Afghanistan into a positive experience, an incredible experience, and I'm able to share [it]."

"I love giving back," she said, citing her opportunities as a soldier, a medic, a nurse and now, a titleholder. "It gives me the best feeling in life; it's my passion." *

(Story by Army Staff Sgt. Mary Flynn, National Guard Bureau.)

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I Never Got to Know You...

By Betsy Beard

Those of us who have lost a loved one know what it is like to be left holding up our end of a relationship in which the person who died is no longer able to contribute in a meaningful, vocal, earthly, timely fashion. As adults, we cling to the connections we had, the memories we shared, the life we once lived. We touch the physical reminders of our loved one: clothes, "toys," pictures, favorite belongings. And we strain to remember exactly what he said, how she felt, who he became.

But for those very young children who can't remember Daddy or Mommy's touch, there are too few memories to recall. And in the case of children who were born after the death of this very important person, the years stretch forward without any memories to access. Years spent without the pictures of shared moments that we prize, and without a firm grasp of who this person was. The baby born after his or her father died, never got to laugh with him, bond with him, love him... were never even fortunate enough to have met him in person.

For those children the task is far greater than reminiscing over a relationship once shared. The task is to create a complete relationship in the wake of the loss. As the years unfold, and the child begins to develop mentally, emotionally, and physically, he will begin to wonder why there are no pictures of himself in daddy's arms. She will wonder if Daddy would have loved her. They will perhaps be jealous of older siblings and their relationships and memories. They will see documentation of how much Dad did with and for his other children before he was gone.



How can we help these young children fill the void of a relationship that never had a chance to begin? Their missing parent didn't get tired of them, run out on the family, abandon them, or find someone else he liked better. Their parent answered the call of duty, served honorably as an active member of our armed forces, was committed to making a safer world for all of us, and in particular for his own children. Their parent died while protecting us all.

Creating a relationship where none existed can be a daunting task. As these children grow and mature, and as their understanding of death becomes more realistic, their questions will become more complex, perhaps more involved. Their grief will surface in different ways at different ages, but one thing won't change: their need to know the person who wanted to invite them into this world in the first place.

Melissa Givens, whose husband Jesse was killed in May of 2003, just twenty-eight days before the birth of their son Carson, is now beginning to get more questions from four-year-old Carson. She is also seeing in Carson the emotions of grief that come with a deeper understanding of the permanence of the death and separation. Since Jesse's death in 2003 others have begun the same journey that the Givens family has embarked on. But others have gone on ahead and already traveled this difficult journey.

Darla Reed, a survivor who was pregnant with their third child at the time her husband Joe was killed in 1996, has had more than eleven years' experience helping her children to know their father. She writes, "I have made a constant effort to help

my children know their father; he is indeed still part of our family." Some of the suggestions below come from Darla. Some of the suggestions are from Linda Goldman, LPC, thanatologist, and author. Although the suggestions are designed to help create a relationship where none existed, they are also valuable tools to use with children of all ages.

★ Have photographs of the missing parent in the child's room. One mom placed the photograph of the baby's father in her baby's crib.

★ Create a book about dad with and for the child. Have the child send out letters to friends and families requesting stories and pictures about his dad. Include a picture of the child with the letter. (It is harder to say no to a child than to an adult who is requesting stories.) Work on the book together. Darla shared, "I have some precious letters that I know the children will turn to throughout their lives. Each letter gives a piece of their father's character: his integrity, his leadership qualities, his sense of humor... I am grateful for these letters because then they know it's not just my opinion that their father was an amazing person. I have evidence!"

★ Share a letter the father wrote before the child was born, or write a letter telling the child what YOU remember about what his dad said about him. Let the child know if his father chose his name, or if he was named after his father.

★ Allow the child to share in anniversary and birthday observances for the deceased: light the candle, help plant a tree or flower, and take pictures of the child doing it for his own memory book.

★ It is important to involve the child and bring him into the memories. Use videos, voice messages, and photos. Darla was blessed to have "journals,

letters, videotapes, and even audiotapes of Joe talking to me when he was at war. I like the fact that Joe can still teach his children with the words of wisdom he left behind."

★ Let the child share in the times when the older siblings reminisce about Dad. If the child begins repeating stories and inserting himself into the story, a reality check can be as simple as saying, "I bet you really wish you had been able to do that with Dad, don't you?"

★ Make a picture frame and choose a special picture to place in it.

★ Have a special Treasure Box for the child to decorate, and allow him to choose an item that belonged to his dad, something that he can keep forever... a medal, softball, a favorite tie.

★ Set aside a special private Dad time and allow the child to ask any questions he wants about Dad. One-on-one time is important.

★ If the child is jealous of the older sibling's relationship, give him special things to do, practical activities with choices to empower him. Allow them to repeat stories they have heard, if they feel disenfranchised.

★ Talk about the child's father. Darla reports, "I probably drive my kids crazy with, 'your dad loved this song, or that movie, or this type of food.' I take every chance to share with them conversations we had, how their dad felt about God, how he valued his family, and how he served in the church and his community.

★ Consider having a portrait made that includes the entire family. Darla had her brother stand in for Joe, and then created a portrait. "I have precious pictures with Joe and our two oldest children and it made me sad that our baby, Jessica, didn't have any so I had an artist do a family portrait of us. Joe is right by Jessica, his hand

on her shoulder, and her hand on his." Melissa is planning a photomontage with Carson perhaps looking skyward, and Jesse looking down from heaven.

Although Melissa and Darla are separated in experience by time and distance, they both independently brought up one very important aspect of creating relationship: the importance of enlisting extended family in the process, and particularly the immediate family of their spouse. Melissa overcame relationship obstacles so that the previously estranged relationship could grow, and she has become very close to her mother-in-law. Darla moved to the state where her in-laws lived and stayed there for six years. They both agree that, if at all humanly possible, it is important to maintain the family ties with the people who raised their children's father. Parents and siblings of the deceased loved one offer a huge repository of stories, sayings, personality quirks, and incontrovertible evidence of the person who grew up to father the precious children you are raising alone. Both military widows also found both strength and comfort in attending TAPS Survivor's Seminar and Good Grief Camps. *

This article is dedicated to the memories of:

Army PFC Jesse Givens,
an ironworker who watched the towers fall on 9-11, considered the fatherless children resulting from the attack, and enlisted at the age of 32, to prevent further terrorist attacks on American soil.

Army CPT Joseph Oliver Reed III,
West Point graduate, Gulf War veteran, Company Commander 82nd Aviation Brigade, Ft. Bragg, NC who made sure "things were right with God and family" every time he took his Kiowa Warrior up.

DO YOU EVER

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



Have you ever listened to the stars and wondered who wrote their melody? Have you ever watched the sun rise and wondered who's in charge of THAT? Do you ever wonder about snowflakes and starfish, knowing each one is unique and special and wonder if the artist will ever run out of patterns?



Are you intrigued with the mysteries of the universe or are you content to know the world spins on its axis and that gravity will seek its revenge on all of us one day? Do you ever wonder who put the fragrance in the rose buds and then surrounded such beauty with thorns? Do you ever wonder who dreamed up artichokes and asparagus?



Do you ever wonder why it rains only after you wash the car and never during the week when you are stuck inside at your desk? Do you ever wish you knew who was responsible for calories and fat grams?

Do you ever feel alone? Do you ever feel lonely and wonder if your voice is heard by anyone? Do you ever give up looking for THE star or THE face or hoping against hope that the night will turn into day and we can all go back again?



What happened to coloring books and bubble gum and baseball trading cards and marbles and hopscotch and "kick the can"? Who thought up fireflies and hummingbirds and bumblebees and honeybees?

Do you ever wonder who made the mountains and why? Have you ever dreamed of sliding down a rainbow or wandering through a cloud? Who decided which things would fly and which would walk and how come some can swim while others don't do much of anything?

Who painted the meadows of wildflowers? And who wakes up the sun every morning and tucks in the Man in the Moon? Who made mud (it couldn't have been a Mother!)? Have you ever thought about being 6 again and running through the rain puddles? How come new shoes always seem to find the biggest puddles and bring the most trouble?

How come ice cream cones melt too fast in the summer and you cannot even find one in the winter? How come when you're 4 you don't want a nap and now we have to wait until we're 20 times 4 for another one? What ever happened to naps?

Have you ever wondered who you are? Or how you got wherever you are? Or where you're going or why you are?

How come the toast always burns, the pantyhose always runs and the car never has enough gas, when you're late? And how come the world's slowest driver is in front of YOU this morning, of all mornings?

Thanks with every

WONDER?

Have you ever wondered why air feels softer in summer and why Dalmatian puppies don't have spots? Who thought of mixing lightening and thunder and getting a rainbow? Who's in charge of THAT?

Who's in charge of bells ringing and sunlight sparkling on icicles? Who made the oceans and the wind and the merry-go-round and cotton candy? Who invented moonbeams and why do they look silvery on the water?

Why do we do laundry on Monday, iron on Tuesday and pray only on Sunday? Why are there 7 days in a week instead of 9 and who turns the wheel of the seasons? Who makes daylight come after darkness and then again and again and again, forever in an endless circle?

Who thought of love and why do we fall in love? Shouldn't we rise in love and dance with joy? And who decided who would know love and who would find each other? Who keeps score and minds the passing of each day, counting the number of moments we each are allowed to have?

Who gave me you and who took you away? Where do you go when the dance is over and how did you get there? Are you ok and do you miss me as much as I miss you? Are you still young or have the years etched themselves upon your face as they have on mine?

Are you happy and can you see me, as I often wish I could you? Do you remember me and the moments we laughed? Can you recall the secrets we shared and the life we lived or was it all just a dream?

I do not know the answers to these and so many more questions. I cannot hear the answers or understand their meanings, but it makes little difference anymore. I no longer need proof or tangible evidence to know that love lived once within me and although my arms are empty, my heart is full.

I do not need to know the whys. Perhaps there are no answers that will satisfy everyone or anyone, but there once was love and I held it close. And if we can remember that and keep it near when memory fails, then starlight and daylight and moonlight become the same and we can live now, in LOVELIGHT until FOREVER comes for us and we can find our way to somewhere new. *

I don't have to wonder who gave me you, and I don't have to know, but I'm saying THANKS with every breath I take, every moment I live. It's wasn't long enough, you and I, but it was something and for that, I am forever grateful and I will never wonder why.

breath I take...



Mother-in-law & Daughter-in-law

By Stephanie Frogge



The searing pain of loss envelops us completely in the days and weeks and months following the death of our beloved, whether that person was our son, daughter, brother, sister, husband, wife, daddy, mommy, or significant other. The pain effectively keeps us focused on ourselves and the unique relationship we had with the person who is now gone forever from our earthly lives. It is hard to cope with our own feelings as we traverse the minefield of new, raw grief. It is harder

yet to acknowledge the profound loss and separation that others feel in the aftermath.

In some families, one troubling secondary impact of the death of a married soldier is the stress it places on the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Arguably the two people most profoundly affected by the death may find themselves at odds with one another as a result of that stress.

An open letter to my daughter-in-law...

Even as I know that you will never forget my son, and he will always be a part of you, I am keenly aware that the day may come when you fall in love again and in sense, he will be replaced. Fair or not, there's a place inside of me that recognizes that you might have another partner but I will never have another son.

As much as I want to mother you, especially during what may be the hardest loss you will ever face, please forgive me and try to understand if there are moments I pull away from you. My anguish is so awful at times that your pain is simply more than I can bear. It's not you; during those times I can't stand anyone else's pain either.

Please remember that we are his family too. It's very hurtful to hear you talk about his family without including his parents, siblings, and the extended family, all of whom loved him very much.

If I appear to be prying into your financial affairs, I hope you will understand that it's because I care and because I want your money to serve

you as well as it possibly can. My son is no longer here to protect and provide for you but his financial legacy can assure that you can live in comfort as you begin to heal. You know he would be angry with both of us if his death also resulted in unnecessary financial hardship for you.

As a married man, when my son died the decisions were yours to make, the benefits were assigned to you, the recognition of his service made to you, and the gestures of condolence addressed to you. And that is how it should be. But please understand there are times when I, as his mother, wish that the enormity of my loss would also be recognized and acknowledged. That does not mean I think my pain is somehow "worse" or that you should not be receiving the attention that comes when a soldier falls. It simply means that there is value and comfort in those gestures of condolence that I sometimes yearn for.

Please recognize that regardless of how long ago my son left his childhood home, he's still my child and the years

that he lived under my roof and I actively parented him are a core part of who I am. Given the man he was, I expected to have his care and support in my old age and his death robs me of significant parts of my future.

I feel that my life is the one that has drastically changed. The greatest pain that one can ever endure is the loss of their child. This to me seems so unfair! We are to be outlived by our children, not bury them. I feel that you in a way can "replace a husband" once you remarry but I can never replace my child. As painful as it will be for me, you may find love again - I on the other hand will never have another child. My son who was the best part of me is gone and I feel alone.

Thank you for indulging me during those moments when I speak of him as though he was a saint. You and I know better than anyone else in the world that he wasn't perfect, but there are moments in my own healing when my heart somehow "remembers" in a different way than my head.



I recognize that you are the one that my son chose to create a future with. You are the one that nurtured him as a man and that he turned to for support before his death. You hold a part of him in your memories that I will never know. I am sorry that you lost part of yourself the day he died.

Thank you for EVERYTHING that you did to make him the man who will always be my hero. *



An open letter to my mother-in-law...

Please remember that your son wanted to be married to me. Whether or not I am the one you would have selected as your son's partner, I am the one he chose. Trust that he made the right decision and that my willingness to marry him was a reflection of the extraordinary man that you helped create.

I knew your son as a man, not a boy. Although I treasure your stories and memories of my husband's youth, please understand that my perspective is of a very different person. When I seek to describe my husband, it will be with anecdotes of his manhood. That doesn't make your stories any less authentic, it simply means that he continued to accomplish, achieve, and aspire even after he left his childhood home.

Please remember that we are his family too. It's very hurtful to hear you talk about his family without including his wife, children, and the extended in-law family, all of whom loved him very much.

If we had children together or if your son accepted my children from a previous relationship, I hope that you will continue to grandparent them and help keep their father's memory alive in their heads and their hearts. If we did not have children, I hope that you

will not use that to somehow diminish the significance of our relationship. I already hear people say, "Well, it's not like you had children" as though that somehow makes my pain any less. Maybe we wanted to some day and that is yet another experience I will never have with him. If we had children maybe I would feel like a living part of him is still with me giving me a reason to get up in the morning.

I am sincerely glad that my husband's relationship with you as an adult was such that he could confide in you and seek your advice. Like any marriage, ours had its ups and downs and it may be that my husband sought your counsel when we had problems. As you well know, marriage is challenging under the best of circumstances and military life brings with it additional stresses. Please do not characterize our marriage as being rocky or suggest that we were on the verge of divorce. That feels like an attempt to diminish the significance of his death to me.

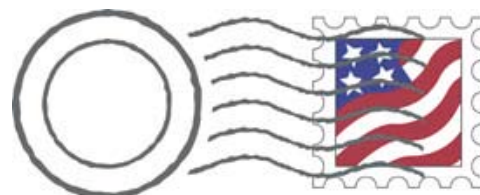
Please don't use the "time factor" argument with me. As measured by the number of years you lived under the same roof, it may be that you lived with him longer than I did but just as you loved him fiercely even before he was born, length of acquaintance does not equate with depth of feeling or enormity of loss.

I feel as though my life is the one that has drastically changed. I was the one he came home to at night, I was

the one he called for comfort and now I am the one who lies alone in our bed. I feel as though you have your husband and family to confide in and to console you, whereas my rock is now gone. I cannot even imagine loving someone else right now. My best friend, my love, the best part of me is no longer here and I feel alone.

Thank you for indulging me during those moments when I speak of him as though he was a saint. You and I know better than anyone else in the world that he wasn't perfect, but there are moments in my own healing when my heart somehow "remembers" in a different way than my head.

I recognize that you are the one who brought him into this world. You are the one who nurtured him as a child and raised him, giving him all the wonderful qualities and values that made him the man he became. You hold a part of him in your memories that I will never know. I am sorry that you lost part of yourself the day he died. Thank you for EVERYTHING you did to make him the love of my life. *



Stephanie Frogge serves as the
Director of Peer Support
Programs for TAPS.



Anger and Blame During Grief

I recently had the interesting experience of participating in a TAPS online chat on the subject of anger during the course of grief. The other participants in the chat were mostly family members of service men and women who died during their term of service. I was invited to join the chat based on my role as a psychologist and the presumption that because of my training and experience I would have something to contribute to the conversation. In the course of the chat, numerous questions were posed to me and I answered them as best I could, given the rapid presentation of questions and remarks. But in the time after I participated in this fast-paced discussion, one question I was asked has stayed with me. I realize that at the time I was asked this question, I gave what I thought was a reasonable answer. The question and my response continued to nag at me, and I realized that my response was too simple.

The question I was asked was, "Is it normal to be angry at someone that you hold responsible for your loved one's death?" I responded, "Yes, it is normal to be angry at someone whom you hold responsible for your loved one's death." It turned out that

this question was asked by a mother whose son had been encouraged to join the military by a friend of the family. Since the son had been killed in Iraq, the mother found she had difficulty tolerating this person's presence, as she blamed him for her son's death.

I thought a lot about this brief exchange in the days after it occurred, and I realized that while my brief answer seemed appropriate at the time, it also was inadequate. I realized that I had more thoughts on the subject that I wished I had presented.

While there are many, many differences between people, we all also have traits and tendencies in common with others. One of the traits that people share is the ability to get angry when something is perceived as frustrating or threatening. As there is nothing that we perceive as more threatening than the circumstances involved with the death of someone we love, people naturally often experience anger as they are trying to come to terms with the death of a loved one. I consider anger to be an active emotion in that it motivates people to make their environment safer for themselves and for those they love. Sometimes we know exactly what makes us angry;

other times, we know we are angry but aren't sure exactly why. Blame arises when we make an attribution of responsibility for our feeling of anger. And the reason that the question I was asked about whether it is normal to be angry at someone associated with a death stayed with me, is because I realized that it made me think about the connection between anger and blame.

Blaming is a coping mechanism.

It is a way of indicating where the responsibility lies for the act that caused a person to be angry. Blaming can have positive results, and when it is effective, blame can serve to begin a negotiation that will lead to some kind of recompense or reconciliation. Blame can also initiate a negative cycle of denial of responsibility, counter-blaming, and retribution. This negative cycle is also, unfortunately, a normal part of human behavior for pretty simple reasons. The person who gets blamed for something might also get angry because of feeling threatened by the accusation, and might blame back instead of accepting responsibility. The person who gets blamed might also have a different interpretation of the circumstances, often one that deflects responsibility.

Dr. Mark Lamers

Mark is a psychologist and the program coordinator of a program for high-risk older adults in the San Fernando Valley. He grew up with the field of grief and bereavement studies as the son of pioneering Hospice physician Dr. Bill Lamers. Mark received training with the V.A., where he formed a commitment to giving back to veterans and their families."

In my work as a psychologist, I often find myself working with people who are stuck in cycles of anger and blame. I sometimes get dismayed at the time and energy I see people expend attempting to get others to take responsibility for what they have been blamed for. I realize that people frequently feel compelled to act this way and that for many people it feels right. I believe this is why we recognize that forgiveness is such a virtue, for if forgiveness were easy, everyone would do it. Forgiveness, I've learned, is not a virtue just because it takes the pressure off the person being blamed, but also because it frees the person doing the forgiving from carrying the ongoing burden of holding others responsible.

Like anger, blaming is a normal human behavior. But just because something is a normal part of human experience doesn't mean that it is always reasonable. Sometimes the cost of pursuing something that is right is too high. After losing a loved one, this balance is often extremely hard to find. It can seem impossible to focus on healing, rather than blaming, when one has lost a loved one, especially a son or daughter. I encourage people I work with to try to move through their feelings of anger and

thoughts of blame by deciding what they want to do about it: Is there something they can do to make things better, or something that can happen to make things right? Often, the answer is that there really is nothing that can happen that will make things right. Other times, there are actions that one can do to harness the motivating energy of anger to try and make changes in the world.

Another way to deal with thoughts of blame is to consider the motives of the person who is being blamed. Was the person who is being held responsible intending to cause harm? If they had known in advance that their acts would cause such harm, would they have done the same thing anyway? This way of thinking about blame is an exercise in perspective taking. When we say, "time heals all wounds," we acknowledge that through the perspective gained by the passing of time, even the worst pain decreases. Actively working on perspective taking in the present can also help healing occur.

It is important to recognize that anger and blaming are often normal parts of the experience of grief. It is also important to realize that the normal feelings of anger and normal

thoughts of blame can lead to either positive or negative outcomes. Anger and blame should not be the final result of grief when a loved one has died; they should be aspects of the process that helps lead to the start of healing. I know that this is sometimes a hard perspective to hear when a loss is new. I have also seen that this can be a hard perspective to hear when a loss is not new, when a person feels that all they have left to hold on to is anger and blame.

In retrospect, when I was asked if it is normal to be angry at someone who is held responsible for a death, I wish that I had answered, yes, it is normal – but blaming someone is really just one step in the process that hopefully, in time, will lead to some healing of the pain of the loss. *





Facing the What-Ifs and If-Onlys after a Suicide

By Patsy Rae Dawson

As a survivor - no, as an overcomer - of my 21-year-old son Westley's suicide, the biggest issue for myself (and others) is often facing the what-ifs and if-onlys.

"What if I'd been a better parent?"

"What if I'd tried harder to get him to talk about his problems?"

"If only I'd realized how hard a time he was having."

"If only he'd called me that day."

These natural regrets gain their own momentum, causing a suicide survivor to sink more deeply into depression. After struggling with this cycle of misgivings, I had to find a way to control the invasive thoughts of guilt.

To gain insight, I started a list of the things I did right. I included actions that I did on a regular basis as one item. *For example:*

Things I did right:

- 1. I genuinely loved him and frequently told him so.*
- 2. We listened to country-and-western music together while I drove him to the skating rink, then enjoyed our personal talks on the way home when he was physically tired but emotionally open to visiting.*
- 3. I helped him organize a work area in the garage and then gave him broken appliances that he could take apart and figure out how they worked.*
- 4. I promoted strong ties with his grandparents and other family members by sharing their letters and letting him farm with GranDad. He and I drove the van from California to Texas for a special visit.*
- 5. I let him earn money for skating by mopping the kitchen and wiping down the cabinets with Murphy's Oil Soap.*
- 6. I took him camping with his friends.*

Once I started writing down the list, rather than just mentally rehearsing it, my mind quickly began cooperating. I got out of bed the first night to add five more items. During the next several days, my list grew to 109 items, most of them ongoing.

Then I started a list of regrets - things that, if I could have seen into the future, I'd have done differently. I counted 19 regrets - most of them based on hindsight. *For example:*

Seeing these two lists side - by - side helped put the what-ifs and if-onlys into perspective. This gave me peace and stopped the cycle of misgivings. From time to time, I still wish I could have known some of the secrets of my son's life so I could have acted differently. But seeing the list of things I did right allows me to accept myself and the love I expressed to him in many ways.

After meditating on the two lists for several weeks, some conclusions seemed obvious:

1. We're not mind readers. We shouldn't punish ourselves because someone chooses to keep secrets and refuses to give us all the facts we need to make the right decision.

2. We're not all-wise. Even if we had all the facts, we wouldn't necessarily say or do the perfect thing that would cause the other person to make a healthy choice.

3. We're not all-powerful. We can't control someone else's life. Everyone has choices and sometimes they make the wrong one.

4. We're not divine. We're human beings with limitations in dealing with life's stresses and problems, and so was the person we lost. Sometimes we burden ourselves to be super-parent, super-spouse, super-sibling or super-friend, who always says and does the perfect thing.

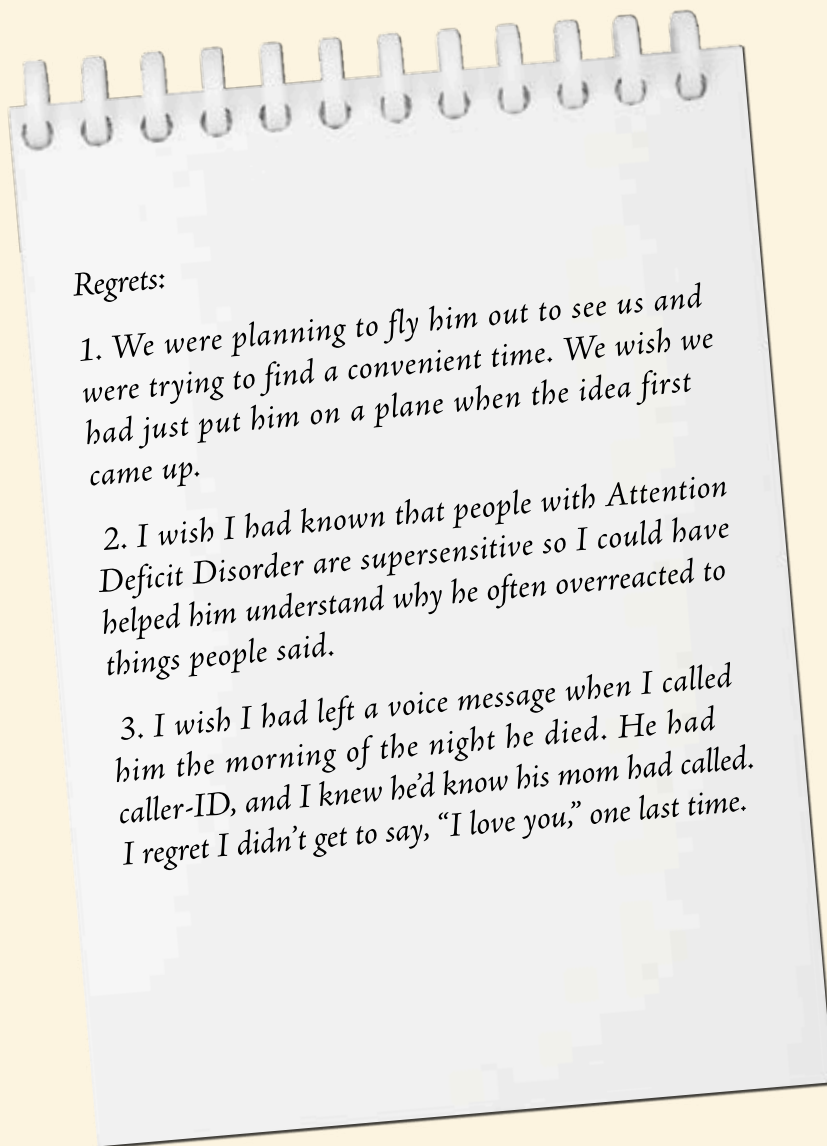
The psalmist David acknowledged that while God searches and knows us, he created us with physical and mental limitations and doesn't give us those super abilities:

Psalms 139:5-6: "Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, And laid Thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain it."

We simply don't possess the inherent ability or the right to take away another person's choices. And thank God he understands and forgives these realities, as he made our loved ones and us the way we are. *

Patsy Rae Dawson is a multi-award-winning author of several books on marriage and the Bible. You can read about her work at www.gospelthemes.com. Originally published in the *Amarillo Globe News* January 7, 2006.

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Outward Bound Experience

By Taylor Nelson

Taylor Nelson is the daughter of Sergeant Michael Nelson, United States Army, who died on May 5, 1997.

The Alex Wetherbee Outward Bound Scholarship is an endowment fund established by Alex's family and awarded in conjunction with TAPS. The scholarship provides funds for young military survivors to attend Outward Bound, and is granted in honor of Marine 1st Lt Alex Wetherbee, who was killed in Iraq on Sept 12, 2004. Alex was an avid outdoorsman, and worked as an instructor for Outward Bound in Colorado during his summers in college.



I still remember when the woman who was announcing the winners of the essay contest said my name.

I stood up... shy in front of a crowd, but I was so stunned and ecstatic that I didn't think. All I wanted to do was call my mom and tell her the great news. When Outward Bound sent us the packet to let us choose from many different places, I sat down and read every page, and looked at every picture. I eventually chose Colorado. When I got the news that I would be going to Colorado, I was excited. I was so overwhelmed with the thought that I would finally conquer my fears and attain my goals that I completely forgot about all the hard work it would take. I talked about it for months and I thought it would be a piece of cake, but when I stepped off that plane, I was in an entirely different world. I was on my own and I was finally able to think about and do things on my own. Every problem that was thrown my way I had to figure out myself. I didn't have my mom, sister, or friends there to help me. This trip was all about me. My first task was to get

myself halfway up a mountain just to get to base. The hill to get there was HUGE! I swore I was going to die. One of the instructors told me that the whole two weeks was going to be like this... nothing but hills. I groaned and wished I had picked a different place.

However, the first few days were fun. We went whitewater rafting, and I discovered that I really liked it and wanted to take it up back at home. Then came a task that I had to face on my own... not to mention that it was a big fear of mine. We had to rappel down a mountainside cliff. I tried four times to rappel down, but I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. I was so ANGRY and so ASHAMED of myself for not doing it. I eventually shrugged it off my shoulders and moved on, playing games with the other groups and all. I even made new friends but they were all in the other group, so when it came to the day that the two groups had to split, I felt kind of alone. I eventually made friends in my own group.



They even coached me through getting up some of those hills. Those hills killed me. Although the hills might have killed me, the walking time gave me time to think and reflect on my life, the mistakes I have made, the things I don't want to do again, and even some of my goals.

When we eventually got to the rock climbing, I convinced myself to do it. I hated the way I was so ashamed

The whole Outward Bound experience will be one that I will never forget. It changed my actions and views. It has made me realize how important life is and how you can't waste time. It made me more of a go-getter. It wasn't just Outward Bound that made my ways change; it was also the help of TAPS. If TAPS hadn't gotten me the

and not a selfish one. My mom and sister were there with me all the way through, and so was the spirit of my father.



I'm so glad that I got a scholarship to Outward Bound. I'm even glad that I picked Colorado. The Colorado hills got me into shape and helped me appreciate nature a lot more than I ever have before. A lot of that change in mind about nature came from one of the kids at Outward Bound, who inspired me a lot. Her name was Cindy and she taught me a lot about the world outside of the city and how nature is so delicate and so beautiful. I'm so glad that I got to go on this adventure and glad I picked Colorado, and I wouldn't change a thing. *

of myself for not rappelling, so I told myself I had to climb to make me proud of myself. When they strapped me to the harness and I started to climb, I was so scared!!! But I made it half way up and rappelled down. I felt pretty proud of myself after that.

scholarship from the Wetherbees, I would have never made it to Colorado. This experience did not just help me, but it helped those around me, too. Because of the trip I learned to care for others and not be so selfish. Speaking of selfish, when it came to this trip I had a very supportive family





ONLINE COMMUNITY

For many survivors, TAPS' online community provides regular support and connection with other survivors as well as caring professionals. Internet access enables survivors to connect with one another regardless of geography or time zone. A bereaved dad in Philadelphia can connect with another dad in Sacramento while two young widows on entirely different continents can post messages for one another. Grief experts who might not otherwise be readily accessible can share their perspectives during live chats. People with similar losses can lean on and learn from each other. TAPS' online community offers several options.

IT GIVES ME THE SENSE THAT I'M NOT CRAZY AND THAT THERE ARE OTHERS OUT THERE ALSO GOING THROUGH THE PAIN THAT COMES WITH THIS. - LINDA, BEREAVED MOM

TAPS FORUMS

TAPS forums, or message boards, are places where survivors can read messages, post messages and reply to the messages of others at any time. Forums are grouped by topic or type of loss but there are no restrictions as to who reads and posts messages. Although messages are posted immediately they are monitored for content to assure that they are relevant and supportive in tone. Many people use the forum to get feedback to specific questions: Is this normal? Does this seem like a good idea? How would others have handled this situation?

LIVE CHATS

Live chats are real-time opportunities for survivors to visit with one another online. Chatters can follow the string of conversation as each comment is posted instantaneously while at the same time typing and posting their own comments. Those unfamiliar with chats usually find that they can follow the conversation easily with just a few minutes' practice. General chats are held every Tuesday at 9:00 p.m. eastern and are open to anyone who has lost a loved one serving in the military.

Monthly Chat Schedule

Bereaved parents

2nd Monday of the month

Bereaved spouses

2nd Wednesday of the month

Parents with no surviving children

3rd Thursday of the month

Bereaved siblings

4th Wednesday of the month

★★ All regularly scheduled chats begin at 9:00 p.m. eastern time. ★★

Bereaved teens ages 13 - 20 and their Good Grief Camp mentors also have a monthly chat but to ensure their safety and privacy, that date and time is not publicized. For more information about the teen chat send an email to heather@taps.org.

THIS IS A RELEASE FOR ME WHERE I CAN'T BE JUDGED BECAUSE I AM NOT ALONE.
- BETHANY, BEREAVED SISTER

JUST KNOWING THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND HOW WE FEEL AND WHAT IS IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS IS PEACE AND COMFORT. - RICHARD, BEREAVED DAD

In addition to the regularly scheduled weekly and monthly chats, special topic chats are held periodically. Check the chat calendar anytime to find out what's on the schedule. If you have an idea for a chat topic please send it to stephanie@taps.org.

Sibling Network

Bereaved adult siblings stay connected with one another through a list serve that sends out a group email to everyone registered with the group any time someone posts a message. Participation is limited to bereaved siblings and membership is by invitation only. Siblings may post messages and read the messages of others sent to the whole group or may connect with individual members one-on-one via email.

Fiancé Network

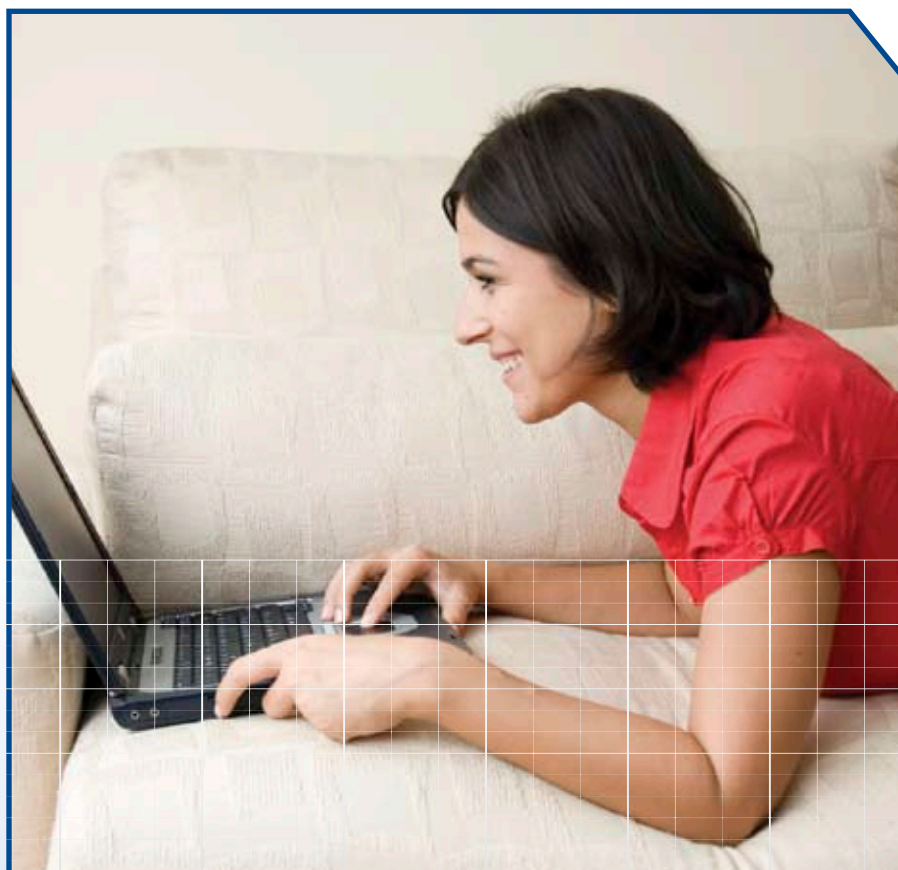
TAPS is developing a similar network for fiancés and significant others similar to the sibling network. To receive an invitation to join either group, please email stephanie@taps.org.

Saturday Morning Message

Upon request, survivors may receive via email a weekly message of comfort and support written by TAPS volunteer Carol Lane, herself a bereaved mom. Many bereaved parents and other survivors have also connected one-on-one through this weekly message. To be added to the list, please email ce.lane@verizon.net

Even if you're not as computer savvy as you'd like, the online community is easy to master and TAPS staff are here to help. Become a part of

the TAPS online community today. To register, go to www.taps.org and click on the online community box on the left side of the page OR click on the far right tab across the top that says "online community." From there follow the prompts. If you would like to know more about any facet of TAPS' online community or need assistance, email stephanie@taps.org. *



THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN SAY ONLY TO PEOPLE IN THE SAME BOAT WITH YOU, KNOWING YOU WILL BE UNDERSTOOD! - LENA, BEREAVED WIFE

I GET MORAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT. I GET PEOPLE PRAYING FOR ME. I GET IN TOUCH WITH PEOPLE WHO CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT I WENT THROUGH. - JOY, BEREAVED MOM

I DON'T FEEL SO ALONE. - MARY ANN, BEREAVED MOM

Blogging* Your Heart Out

By Cait Needham

Widow of Army Master Sgt. Robb G. Needham who was killed in Iraq, September 20, 2006.

Do you still feel like you're in a dream and you just won't wake up? I only ask because that's how I feel on a regular basis. For some reason, becoming a military widow is difficult to wrap my head around, and I just don't feel like it's my life; therefore, I'm dreaming. But it's not a dream and it really happened to me. Like you, I thought he and I would be able to grow old together. I never imagined my husband would die in Iraq. So now I find I have to ask myself what I can do to help myself through this grief that I feel every day of the week.

I've thought about this a lot, especially when I'm alone late at night and the house is exceptionally quiet. I write. I journal. I think. Mostly I write about what I'm feeling in my two online blogs, and I write in forums like the TAPS forum on the TAPS website. I find that writing what I feel is therapeutic in several ways.

✍ When I write I'm able to put down on paper what I only think in my head, and never say out loud to anyone, especially if I'm mad at them. I have

learned (the hard way, I might add) that most people don't understand the type of anger I've experienced since my husband's death. Instead of telling them, I write it out.

✍ When I write I'm able to express my thoughts and feelings more clearly than if I tell someone. Writing helps me think things through more thoroughly so I'm able to find some sort of peace in my "oh, so crazy life." For me, writing helps me process what I'm feeling in ways that speaking to someone doesn't. I can pause as I'm writing to get my thoughts straight, but if I do that in speaking to someone, I feel the other person gets annoyed with me for pausing.

✍ When I write I don't have to justify what I write to anyone, and I never worry about grammar or spelling either. My thoughts and feelings are mine and mine alone, and no one can take them away from me. I write after everyone in the house has gone to bed. No interruptions or disturbances, and no little children wanting to help me with my writing. I'm alone when I write and I like it that way.

Writing and reading forums/blogs also helps me discover new ways to get through each day. Others who are going through the same feelings as I may have an idea or "therapy" that could possibly help me. And I find for myself comfort in knowing I'm not the only one who is now a military widow.

Online blogs and forums contain a wealth of information. If there are issues that will affect us military widows, you will usually find it in a blog or a forum before you hear it on the news. And other widows who have been in this "widowhood" longer just might know something that will help us, the new ones.

So I'd like to encourage everyone to start reading the forum page of the TAPS website, www.TAPS.org, and contribute when you feel prompted to do so. Or begin writing a blog online. From my own experience, sitting around feeling sorry for myself didn't do me any good, but writing helps me face each new day. The calendar never stops. The days keep coming, so I keep writing. *



* The term **blog** is a shortened form of the words **web log**. A **blog** is an online diary or newsletter and is posted to a website that allows people with little or no technical expertise to create an online journal. The person who does this is the **blogger** and the activity is **blogging**. A **blog** may be interactive, as well, allowing readers to post comments to the **blogger**.

An Arlington Anthem “Here Rests in Honored Glory”

By Donald B. Miller



A Composer's Perspective

Here Rests in Honored Glory is the first musical setting to be based on the inscription on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The work is scored for a choir of mixed voices and an accompaniment of three trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, and keyboard.

The piece may be performed publicly on Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, Fourth of July, and any occasion honoring a fallen hero who has given the ultimate sacrifice serving our country.



My wife Mary and I have five children between us. Three of our children have served in the military, two in the Navy and one in the Air Force. (Our daughter continues to serve in the Air Force and has served in both Iraq and Afghanistan multiple times.) We know the numbing anxiety, worry and fear all of us have experienced. However, we've not been asked to embrace the total sacrifice that you have been asked to give. I wanted to do something that would let you know the love and gratitude a nation feels for your loved one, for you, and your family. Through music, I wanted to

acknowledge that we as a nation owe our safety, our freedom, indeed, our way of life to you and your fallen hero. As a professional musician, I created a piece of music that will hopefully give comfort to you now and in the years ahead. In one small way it was something I could do to humbly and with great reverence thank you for the sacrifice you've given.

To benefit TAPS, a CD of the composition was recorded with the North Carolina Master Chorale, Alfred E. Sturgis, Music Director. On October 25th 2005, Dr. Sturgis, the 180 voice North Carolina Master Chorale and

instrumentalists, recorded the CD in the First Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, NC. The CD sells for \$6.70 with \$5.02 from the sale of each CD going to Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. We are grateful we've been able to give TAPS a little over \$4,000.00 in less than two years.

The CD will be available at the upcoming 14th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar, Memorial Day Weekend, Washington, DC. If you are unable to attend the Seminar but would like to purchase a CD you can do so by going online:

www.dmmillerfoundation.org

A LETTER FROM Donovan Patton of Blue's Clues

Donovan Patton played Joe on the award winning Nickelodeon television show Blues Clues from 2001 to 2006 and in the spin-off, Blue's Room, from 2004 to 2007



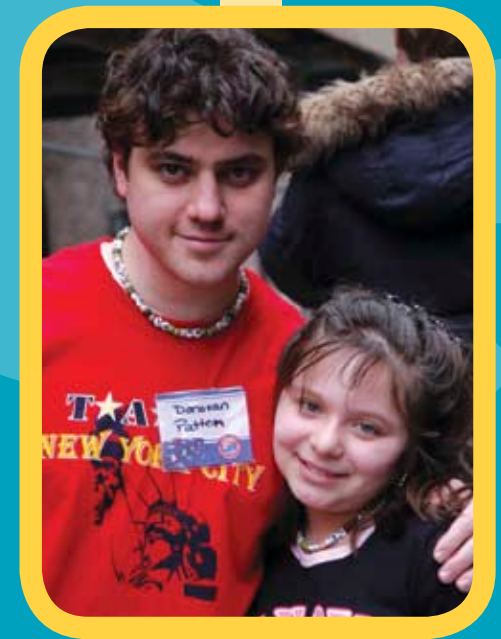
It cannot be overstated how much the TAPS event in New York meant to me. As I may have told you, my brother served in Iraq, and was injured. He has lost members of his Unit, including his Troop whom he'd been training since they were still in Colorado. (His Unit is out of Fort Carson) I have always felt lucky that his injuries, while substantial, are different from soldiers who have lost mobility, limbs, or have given the ultimate sacrifice: their lives. In meeting the families of departed soldiers, it further shows me how lucky my family truly is.

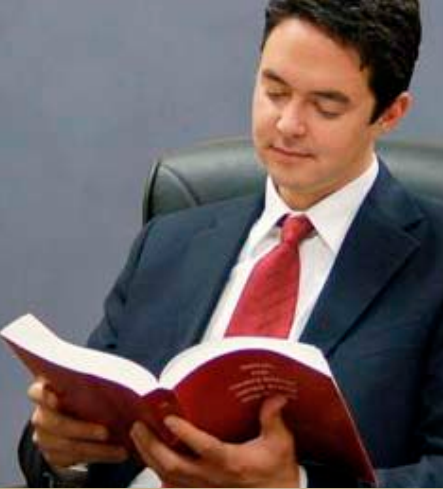
The work you guys at TAPS do is incredibly important. I did not have the opportunity to witness the sessions with the adults, or the teenagers, but the work being done by the kids in my group (and Tina, Adam and Vern) was life changing. The military puts the most extreme demands possible on its soldiers and consequently their families. The children in my group showed courage, strength, compassion, and an openness one might not expect from kids their age, and the volunteers provided the best possible environment to deal with the difficult and complex process of grief. I don't know why, but I am continually surprised by the things people are capable of. I am incredibly proud and profoundly moved to have been there for what you all have done, and I hope to take part in more of your events in the future.

Being, as I put it, "some guy on television," I have been able to go to children's hospitals, help out schools, and participate in the work of several children's charities. In my opinion, it's the best thing "some guy on television" can do. However, my contributions always seem to pale in comparison to the people who do this work everyday, and, coming from a military family, pale in comparison to the work done by all the people in uniform. I have never enlisted in the military like so many in my family have, and I don't desire to. It's just not who I am. But I've had the desire to take part in some kind of organization that helps the people and families who sacrifice their lives and well being for the rest of us; and I thank you for allowing me to take a small part with TAPS which does just that.

Many, many thanks,

Donovan Patton





Honoring our Heroes

Special Agent Nathan J. Schuldheiss

By Sarah Conlon

On the evening of November 1, 2007 we were notified that our beloved son, Nathan J. Schuldheiss was killed in Iraq.

We did not expect this. Nathan was an Air Force Civilian; a Special Agent with the Office of Special Investigation. He graduated law school with endless possibilities. He had dreams, big dreams of serving his country, running for public office one day, making a difference in a world that needed leaders to commit to something greater than themselves. He volunteered to go to Iraq. His role was to gather counter intelligence and counter terrorist information in order to protect the military serving in the war zone. We did not expect it when we were informed Nathan and two of his Air Force team were killed when their vehicle was hit by an IED. Such a tragic loss for so many families and friends.

I cry daily. My heart continues to break in a million pieces over and over again. I have difficulty breathing, the heaviness in my chest exhausts me at times, and the twisting in my gut makes me want to scream in agony. Small talk annoys me and I finally installed caller ID to screen my calls. I am mourning. Intellectually I understand grief and mourning. I am a psychologist for goodness sake.

Intellectually I understand the commitment to serving our country. My father served in Vietnam and retired after a long Navy career. Nathan's father spent 27 years in Air Force Special Operations. But Nathan was a civilian not active duty. We did not expect this. Yet, now I stand with so many military families trying to find my place as a civilian survivor. I am trying to connect with those of us who truly know the pain of loss. Reading the many stories and memorials of loved ones in the TAPS newsletter has given me some strength. It has been through TAPS that I feel connected to others who are where I am and share the hope to keep moving forward. As a mother of a civilian killed in Iraq I have felt so alone, not qualified to join Gold Star Families, turned away from the Veteran's Administration for counseling, and denied other services and support offered to military survivors. It is not the individuals who differentiate between military and civilian. It seems to be rules and regulations, some antiquated and some ridiculous. Thank you TAPS for bridging the bureaucratic

gap and acknowledging that pain is pain and service is service. And my sincere gratitude to the military and civilian families who share my grief, share their stories, and genuinely care. We are bonded together at the deepest level of love and compassion.

Nathan was my only son; a bright, intelligent, personable gentleman. I miss him every day. Nathan asked that those who hear of his untimely death also hear his voice in these words by John Stuart Mill,

"War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself." *

★ TAPS has included all surviving families whose loved one died while serving in support of the military mission since it began in 1994, and increased its outreach in 2003. Part of this expanded outreach effort included the first-ever TAPS Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for contractor and government civilian surviving families, held in Dallas, Texas in March 2008. TAPS also offers a special forum and an online support group. In August, 2008 TAPS will hold the second Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for our contractor/US government civilian families. For more information, visit WWW.TAPS.ORG

FUNDRaiser



BRACELETS FROM THE WOMEN OF IRAQ

A TOKEN OF THANKS AND REMEMBRANCE

In a wonderful partnership with the women of Iraq, T★A★P★S is offering a unique bracelet. These beaded bracelets, sent from the Middle East with love and gratitude, make very special gifts.

Please help us support T★A★P★S and our programs for the families of those who have died in the military this year by buying them to wear and, in the tradition of the Iraqi women, to share.

For information and to order, visit:

**WWW.TAPS.ORG AND CLICK ON
“BAGHDAD BRACELETS”**



When I served in Baghdad, Iraq, I was so moved by the love and care of the Iraqi women and their overwhelming appreciation for the sacrifice of the Americans serving there. It was common for many of the Iraqi women I worked with to give away jewelry to their friends, and they often wore many of these beautiful beaded bracelets for just this opportunity. It meant more to them to share a gift and show their love than to have a material possession, even something precious. Several Iraqi women I came to know placed bracelets on my wrists and gave me a hug. I wear them to this day to remember their selfless courage.

*Bonnie Carroll, TAPS Survivor
(Army widow), USAFR Major.*



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