

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

T★A★P★S[®]

FALL 2019 | **MAGAZINE**



THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING SUPPORT

A GATHERING OF MEN ★ THE UNBROKEN CHAIN ★ I WALK THESE WOODS

A Forever Family

Dear TAPS Family,

Thank you for allowing us into your home through the pages of *TAPS Magazine*. Whether sipping that morning cup of coffee, enjoying an evening on the porch, or sitting quietly on your couch, your TAPS Family is with you and we are honored to connect with you in this very special way.

All of the wonderful TAPS services available for you have been created to offer understanding, support, and hope. We are a forever family, and whether you need a hug today or help tomorrow, we will be here for you.

Fall may bring thoughts of a chilly winter to come. It also brings the activity of school buses back on the road, football and hockey season, and stores preparing for holiday shoppers. It reminds us that while the activity of life goes on for others, it may not feel like it goes on for us. We may even feel frozen and unable to move. I know I felt that way after my husband died in the Army. So that's where having TAPS as your support can be so helpful!

Through TAPS, you have a loving, caring community there for you with open arms. Whether you call the Helpline in the middle of the night, or post on our Facebook page or Tweet your #TAPsfam tagging @TAPSOrg, or share time together in a chat room or read a blog post from another survivor — we are here. If you need casework assistance with benefits questions or emergency needs, or emotional support from peers and professionals — we are here. If you just need someone to listen and understand — we are here.

There are fantastic opportunities for us to connect, share, and grow together. In the pages of this issue, you'll learn about some of our upcoming events, including our 2020 National and Regional Military Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps, Family Camps, Women's Empowerment and Men's Programs, Survivor Experiences, Expeditions, TAPS Togethers, Care Groups and so much more. You can always get an updated listing of events in your area on our website at taps.org/events and if there isn't something in your area, call us and we'll get it going.

This Fall, look for moments of comfort and calm to breathe in the crisp air, get cozy in a warm sweater, or enjoy the golden leaf colors. We are there, walking alongside you. Reach out your hand to your TAPS family whenever you need.

Looking forward to seeing you soon. In the meantime, sending you much love and a big hug,



TAPS

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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.

TAPS is here

24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK

- ★ National Military Survivor Helpline
24/7 at 800.959.TAPS (8277)
- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Connections to Community-Based Care
 - ★ Casework Assistance
 - ★ Emergency Financial Assistance
 - ★ Education Resources and Support for Post-Secondary Education
- ★ TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing
 - ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Seminars, Retreats, One-Day Gatherings
 - ★ Sports & Entertainment Events
- ★ Good Grief Camp for Children/Teens
 - ★ National Military Mentor Program
 - ★ Young Adult Program
 - ★ TAPS Online Community
 - ★ TAPS Magazine

For more about the resources we provide, turn to page 27.

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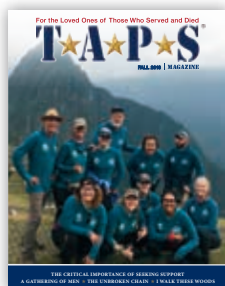
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Survivors reaching new heights together at Machu Picchu in Cuzco, Peru. Learn more about TAPS Expeditions experiences on page 9.

Dear TAPS...



ATLANTA FALCONS APPRECIATION

We want to thank TAPS. You did an outstanding job putting together the Military Appreciation Day with the (Atlanta) Falcons. The suite and Falcons were really cool and the boys just loved Matt Ryan coming in and presenting his jersey! That really made my eyes water! The entire event made us feel like American Royalty! TAPS did a great job!

John and Kim Guilfoil

Surviving parents of
Airman First Class Robert W. "Robby" Guilfoil,
U.S. Air Force

TAPS IS A CONSTANT

TAPS has been the constant in my life that remembers Steve's birthday, anniversaries of his passing, and holidays. I know he made a difference and his service and life are appreciated and remembered. I know I am not alone with the loss of my Veteran. Thank you TAPS family.

Brenda Litaker

Surviving spouse of
Stephen H. Litaker, U.S. Army veteran

EMPOWERED AND REBORN

This (Saturday Morning Message) gave me the perfect opportunity to share my experience

from the Women's Empowerment retreat in the Poconos July 22-27. Creativity was a foreign language for me prior to that week. Even when I first got there, I didn't know what to do with all the tools to express creativity. Through all the workshops, connections, and support, I found my talent, self-reflection and self-expression. I always knew Devin's gift for being creative and expressive. I didn't realize until the retreat that mine was buried so deep within me that I didn't know it existed. I feel like I was reborn. I highly recommend this experience to those that are ready to find themselves again after our loss.

Charlene Bigelow

Surviving mother of
Sgt. Devin Lynch, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

NEVER MISSING IMPORTANT DATES

TAPS is an incredible organization and I can't say enough about the wonderful support my children and I have received. They are so thoughtful and caring, never missing an important date or anniversary. The cards or emails that they are thinking of us are so special.

Christy Goodwin

Surviving spouse of
Retired Maj. David S. Goodwin, U.S. Army

CONTINUED SUPPORT

I feel that TAPS was there when needed for emotional and resource support. They were very instrumental in assisting in the navigation of finding available resources. TAPS exhibits a genuine concern for the surviving spouse and family and continues to follow up and check in on a regular basis.

Gary Brown

Surviving spouse of
Grant E. Sheppard, Jr., U.S. Army, retired

SUPPORT AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE

TAPS has helped me with continued contact with a counselor, has helped me with providing resources with community issues, basic understanding of navigation of the VA system, among many other things. They continue to support me even 2 1/2 years after my husband's passing. Emotional support and outreach is immediately available at a phone call and moment's notice. I appreciate the empathy, sympathy, and understanding in which they express to my grieving and continued journey in this difficult time.

Teresa Strong

Surviving spouse of
Paul Strong, U.S. Navy, retired

THE NEXT BIG STEP

My week at the TAPS College Experience was a time that I believe will have continuing value for me as I finish high school and enter young adulthood. From test taking and writing admissions essays to networking and interviews, this experience provided me with skills that will not just help me in the college application process, but also other important steps further in my life, like finding internships or jobs. One of the most valuable parts of this experience was its specificity to Gold Star families. Gold Star children like myself go through many unique processes as they enter college and the College Experience provided guidance for it all, which is hard to find anywhere else. Ultimately, I have been part of the TAPS family for as long as I can remember, so it seems natural that the organization has had a role in the next big step in my life.

Zoe Evans

Surviving daughter of
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mark "Billy" Evans, Jr.,
U.S. Army

CARE TEAM SUPPORT

I just want to thank you for always being here for me, for checking on me, and offering support. I've been struggling the past few weeks but when you told me about the upcoming FL seminar, it did something to me.

I never thought I'd be feeling this way. I feel different, and I'm so proud of my son. Even though I miss him more than life, I now know I must persevere for him.

I'm really looking forward to the seminar and I'm thankful to God for putting you in my life.

Even though someone may seem sad and too far gone to help, sometimes all it takes is for someone to accept that person where they are and offer unconditional support.

That is what you did for me and it has changed my life.

Sheila Murphy

Surviving mother of
Spc. Etienne Murphy, U.S. Army



Connect With Us!

WRITE TO US

We welcome your thoughts about content in our magazine or any experience you have with TAPS. Letters and other content may be edited for publication. Please write to us at 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, and other TAPS publications. We invite you to read our submission policy and submit your story at taps.org/shareyourstory.

JOIN US ONLINE

Find information on resources and programs on our website taps.org. You'll also find our blog and our Online Community with chats and message boards for connection to others from the comfort of home. Learn more at taps.org/onlinecommunity.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE SATURDAY MORNING MESSAGE

The Saturday Morning Message is a weekly email written by and for survivors. To subscribe, send a request to online@taps.org.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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 [taps4america](https://www.snapchat.com/add/taps4america) |  youtube.com/c/tapsorg

For more on TAPS resources and support, turn to page 27.

The Critical Importance of Seeking Support

Learning from the Geese

By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.

If there is ever a time in life when we need others to support and nurture us, it's when someone we love dies. In many ways, grief work is the most difficult work we will ever do. And hard work is less burdensome when others lend a hand.

Sharing the devastation that results from the death of someone precious won't make the hurt go away, but it does make it more bearable. In reflecting on this need to support each other during times of grief, we might be well-served to observe the five natural instincts for support and companionship demonstrated by wild geese.

Observation One

When the flock is on a journey, the flapping of the wings of each individual goose results in an uplift for the bird that follows. By flying in a "V" formation, the entire flock achieves 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Implication

When we are grieving the death of someone loved, we too are on a journey. Others who are grieving are on a similar journey, and we can all be uplifted by journeying together. No, you need not travel alone, nor should you try!

Observation Two

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it experiences the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone. The goose then realizes it needs to get back into formation to take advantage of the collective lifting power of the flock.

Implication

Just as geese are well served to stay in formation with those on a similar journey, we as humans are better off if we accept the lifting power of those who go before us. We are grace-filled when we open ourselves to the support of our fellow travelers.

Observation Three

If any one goose has a problem, two other geese will always drop out of formation and follow the wayward goose to help support and protect it. They stay present to the goose that has special needs until it is able to continue the journey on its own.



Remember, help comes in different forms for different people.

The trick is to find the combination that works best for you and then make use of it.

Implication

If we humans can learn from the wisdom of geese, we will always companion each other in difficult times. Receiving help from others strengthens the bonds of compassion and love that help us survive when we are devastated by loss.

Observation Four

When the goose leading the flock gets tired and overwhelmed, it rotates back into the formation, and another goose flies at the point position.

Implication

No one person on a grief journey can lead the way all the time. At times it is wise to acknowledge that you are tired and need others to care for you and protect you from the headwinds.

Observation Five

While flying in formation, the geese honk to each other as a form of encouragement and mutual support.

Implication

There are times in life when we all need encouragement from those around us to remind us of our interconnectedness. We must allow ourselves to rely on each other, otherwise when we are in grief we end up feeling totally alone and completely isolated.

Where to Turn for Help

“There is strength in numbers,” one saying goes. Another echoes, “United we stand, divided we fall.” This is a time in your life when you need to let other people in. You needn’t let everyone in all the time, but I encourage you to make room for those you trust the most. Carefully chosen friends and family members with whom you feel

safe can often be at the center of your support system.

Seek out people who encourage you to be yourself and who acknowledge your many thoughts and feelings. Open your broken heart a little at a time to those people in your life who are compassionate and loving listeners. In an ideal world, this is your family and friends. If this is not true for you, my hope is that you will seek out other sources of support.

The darkness that grief brings into your life is a place from which you might be tempted to judge others, particularly their motivations. True, they cannot feel your profound loss the way you do, so don’t expect them to be able to do so. Except in cases in which there is evidence that you can’t trust someone’s intentions, try to be open to letting others be of support to you. Remember, you are doing the best you can, from moment to moment, from day to day.

You may also find comfort in talking to a minister or other religious leader. When someone loved dies, it is natural for you to feel ambivalent about your faith and question the very meaning of life. A clergy member who responds with empathy to all of your feelings can be a valuable resource. Just be certain the clergy person you look to for support is a good match for your unique needs.

A professional grief counselor may also be a very helpful addition to your support system. In fact, a good counselor can be something friends and family members can’t be: an objective listener. A counselor’s office can be a place of sanctuary where you can give voice to those feelings you may be afraid to express elsewhere. As with everything else in this overwhelming grief journey, counseling is an intensely personal choice. However, when you find the right counselor, you may well have found a safe haven in which to experience the terrifying jumble of feelings impacting you.

Many mourners discover that grief support groups are one of the best helping resources. In a group, you can connect with others who have experienced similar thoughts and feelings. You will be allowed and gently encouraged to talk about the person who died as much and as often as you like. In these groups, each person can share his or her unique grief experience in a nonthreatening, safe atmosphere. Fellow group members are usually very patient with each other and understand your need for compassionate support with no set time limits.

As a grief counselor, I have been privileged to have thousands of grieving people reach out to me for help. Among the lessons they have taught me is that sharing their grief with others is an integral part of the healing process. Perhaps it is helpful to remember that by definition, mourning means “the shared response to loss.”

Remember, help comes in different forms for different people. The trick is to find the combination that works best for you and then make use of it. I hope this article has helped you understand the importance of reaching out for help during this time in your life. Please don’t try to confront your grief alone. Wrap your arms around yourself, but also open your arms to the loving support that wants to embrace you. You need and deserve companions—friends, relatives, counselors, and others who have experienced similar losses—who will walk with you as you make the difficult journey through grief. ★

*A longtime TAPS supporter, Dr. Alan Wolfelt serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. He has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (co-authored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll.) Visit www.centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt’s books.*

I encourage you to make room for those you trust the most. Carefully chosen friends and family members with whom you feel safe can often be at the center of your support system.

From CAMPUS to CAPITOL HILL

Equipping Young Survivors for the Future

High school brings young people into a new and exciting world: new friends, new opportunities, and new adventures on the horizon as they move toward adulthood. Their futures await, full of promise and hopefulness.

For a week in July, a group of young survivors and their parents or guardians came to our nation's capital to participate in the TAPS College Experience, a four-day college preparatory retreat where surviving children who are sophomores, juniors and seniors get the chance to meet with experts in higher education. From available scholarships, budgeting, preparing resumes, and honing interview skills, these students gained valuable tools and encouragement to help them as they take the next steps in their lives and move toward future goals.

It's not only the students who need to prepare for college. In addition to cultivating the academic experience for these students, programming was offered for the adult guardian to help the entire family through these milestone

moments. Some of the topics discussed included supporting the family, coping with transition throughout life, adjusting to changes in the family system when a child leaves home, developing healthy relationships, encouraging independence and self-sufficiency in the emerging young adults, self-care, and creating a personal identity beyond the role of parenting.

This year's group of students was diverse, engaged, and motivated to seek success in college and in life. They brought with them sharp and inquisitive minds, eager to learn and grow.

Students visited three colleges during the retreat: Georgetown University, the United States Naval Academy and the University of Maryland. These visits exposed these young survivors to campus life and allowed them to explore some options for continuing their education.

Woven within these visits were valuable sessions to guide students on the college application process, available scholarships, and crafting their stories. As young

survivors they have already faced many life challenges. They have profound stories to share about their experiences as well as their aspirations — some directly related to their loss. The “Sharing Your Story” session offered tools and tips for crafting their message, giving it focus and revealing their strength and their determination to succeed. Receiving guidance in sharing their story, both in written and oral form, these students can stand out from the crowd.

A FAMILY EXPERIENCE

Transformation and confidence were not only reserved for the students. Ensuring their success is a family effort. The TAPS College Experience involved the parent/guardian so the family can embrace this next chapter in life with collective confidence, excitement, and hope.

The adults were given time to connect with one another and have open and honest discussions on the emotions of this milestone time in their children's lives — and in theirs. Some are experiencing their first child going off to college, some the last child leaving home. Some face with this their only child.





Some of the topics of discussion among the adults included:

- Apprehensions of a child considering service academies and subsequent military service
- Letting go of some control as their child becomes an adult and worrying as they move away from home
- Balancing their role as a parent with fostering independence in their child
- Other children in the house coping with a sibling leaving home

One exercise offered the opportunity for parents and guardians to give voice to their emotions and their hope for themselves and their children. Given stationery, the adults wrote letters to themselves that will be mailed in six months. The letter was for them to express where they hoped to be in the coming months, reminders of their personal goals or simple words of encouragement. Along with this letter, a blank note card was given so they could write a letter to their child as they depart for college.

The adults had the opportunity to relax and connect, while also witnessing their children gain knowledge and confidence as the week progressed. One mother shared her daughter is where she is today because she had grown up in the TAPS family. This community of survivors had allowed her daughter to be among others with shared experience, stabilize her grief and gain healthy coping skills.

FASHION AND FUN

Setting up these students for success included helping them dress the part. With the help of Macy's at Pentagon City Mall, these young survivors were treated to an afternoon of camaraderie and fashion tips as they selected a new outfit for interviews as they embark on a journey that will help them reach their life goals.

As the week progressed, even those who may have been a bit reserved and shy in the beginning shed their cocoons and exuded a newly found confidence and sense of self. Nowhere was this more evident than at the final activity of the week – a reception on Capitol Hill among congressional leaders and representatives from the business world. These students were able to put into practice all they had learned in sharing their stories and networking, all in their new Macy's outfits!

READY TO FLOURISH

An outfit, a relaxation exercise, tips for sharing a story or writing a resume. Individually, these may be small things. Collectively, they can empower young people and their families as they venture into new phases of life. TAPS wants to support these students and their families as they move forward and provide them the tools they need to learn and grow. Having already faced difficult circumstances, there is an inner purpose and strength present that only needs to be nourished in order to flourish.

These students and their guardians came from across the nation. They toured monuments in our nation's capital, college campuses, and the halls of Congress. Watch out for these young people. They are ready to make their mark and conquer the world! ★



The next TAPS College Experience is scheduled for July 2020. The application process will begin in January 2020.

A GATHERING OF MEN

Calmness, Camaraderie, and Clarity in Yosemite

By Gabriel S. Rao | Surviving brother of Sgt. Elijah Rao, U.S. Army

Sitting near a rolling stream surrounded by the breathtaking wonders of nature, I witness the power of water against rock — moving, reshaping. What a blessing to have this time to become fully aware of my surroundings and myself.

Just like a current reshapes stone, the power of a man sharing openly and honestly has the power to change the world around him. There is a beauty that takes shape when men come alongside one another and become authentic — authentic to the pain, to the hurt, and the sadness that accompanies loss and grief. A new world emerges. One not consumed with a mindset of fear and isolation but one rich in fellowship, openness, and support.

Amid the picturesque valleys, meadows, and granite towers of Yosemite National Park, a group of men came together for three days of adventure and camaraderie.

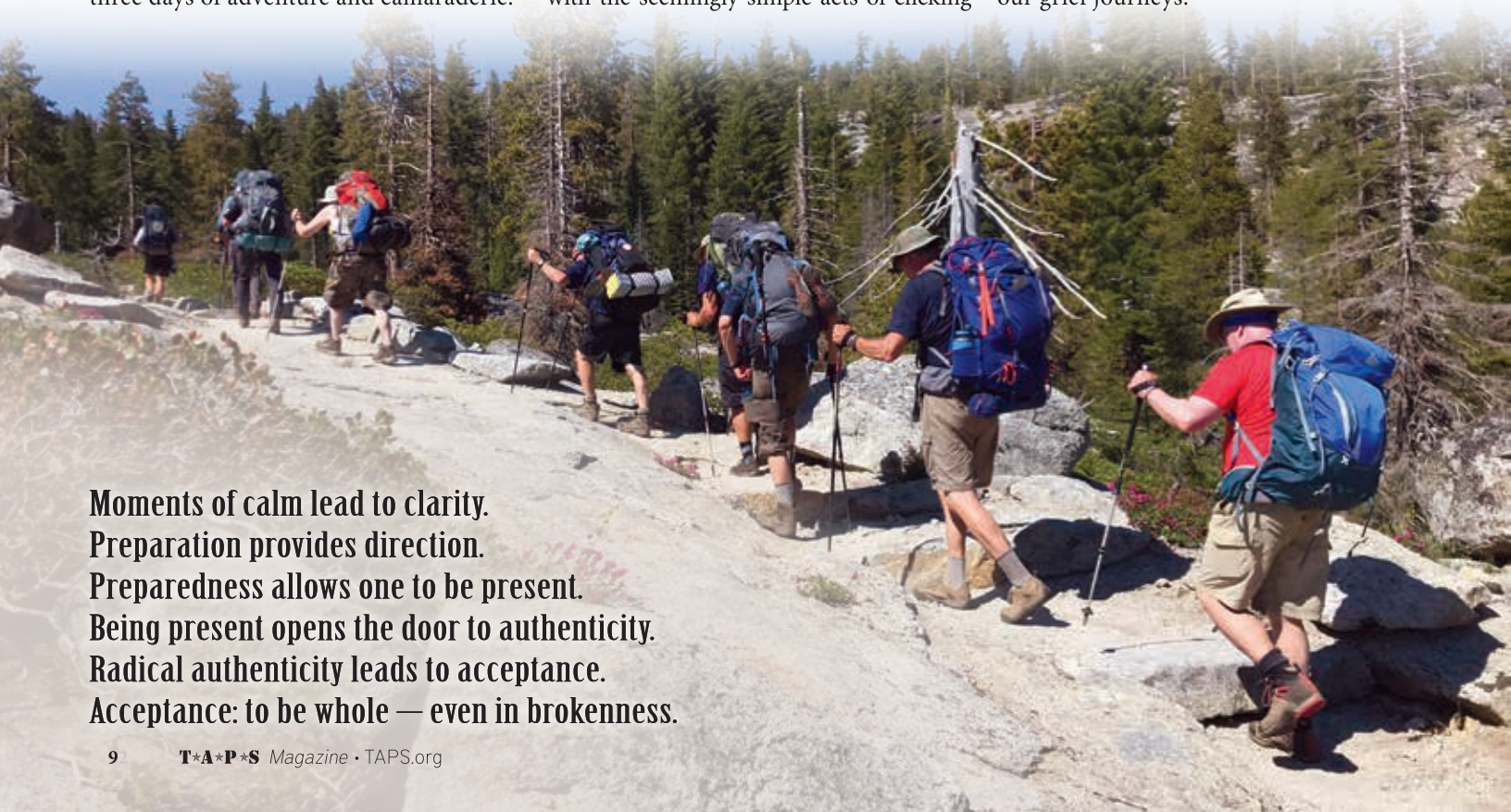
With the hectic pace of life these days, we tend to grant ourselves very few moments to just be still. When grief has entered our lives, we may actually try to do anything within our power to not be still — perhaps through fear that stillness will lead to a cascading flow of tears or a fear of the unknown of what it means to be alone with one's self. When we consciously seek and find moments of refuge, the act of contemplation can lead us to moments of clarity. In the calmness of this space called Yosemite, a group of men were privileged to be in a landscape so large, so awe-inspiring that our inner turmoil lessened as we all began to breathe — deep-breathe — once again. We also made a pact to experience the calmness as a whole and to freely grant ourselves individual time in nature.

For each of these men, the journey began with the seemingly simple acts of clicking

a mouse, clattering a keyboard, or dialing a phone to register for the event. After taking those first steps and making the commitment to attend and challenge one's self, preparation for the journey ahead became paramount.

Preparation is physical: rucking around increasing weight on longer and longer outdoor walks. It is also logistical: which time to fly, which airport to fly into, whether to rent a car or carpool, to stay an extra night. Questions race around — what to bring — ounces turn to pounds on an arduous hike. What do I really need?

Besides the obvious items for an adventure such as this, all we truly need is the commitment to be fully present in the moment and to be open to what nature and the group can bring to our lives and our grief journeys.



Moments of calm lead to clarity.
Preparation provides direction.
Preparedness allows one to be present.
Being present opens the door to authenticity.
Radical authenticity leads to acceptance.
Acceptance: to be whole — even in brokenness.

TAPS EXPEDITIONS offer outdoor, skills-based events requiring dedication, preparation and a sense of adventure. Professional guides lead small groups through some of the world's most challenging and inspiring landscapes.



I've noticed over the years that after we have experienced a traumatic loss, not only are we robbed of our loved one's physical presence, we are also robbed of something for which to prepare. We no longer have the desire or enthusiasm to prepare for that vacation, that dream, or even dinner. We often find ourselves in an abyss of only preparing for another tragedy. Joy is too far away to remember or rekindle. Comfort is found in sectioning off ourselves to shield emotional pain when that future tragedy strikes. But, when we find ourselves in preparation — like for this hike — we find ourselves preparing for things that are good and positive. A shift takes place. A seismic shift in direction, in confidence, and ultimately in hope for what is in store.



In this new state of preparedness we are able to transition into being present. When we are actively grieving, the last place we want to be is in the now. We may find comfort in thinking back to memories of our loved ones and ourselves. Or we picture the futures we thought we were to have but will now never be. The most unthinkable and undesirable place to be is here and now, a time that was never supposed to happen. But, with the shift of now being prepared for your surroundings and the days ahead you find a confidence to step into the present. To be fully immersed in the moment. You're also forced to be in the moment so you can take the next step, look around the bend, hear the bird sing, see the waterfall, and soak in the warmth of the sun as it falls toward the horizon.

Another threshold is approached and breached as this transition takes place. Authenticity is a noun often kept at a distance due to fear. But with preparedness we can address that fear, gain a sense of control over it, and engage authentically. As this gathering of men stepped into authenticity our countenance was changed. Laughter became deeper. Uncomfortableness was expressed, whether from a misaligned backpack or from the early stages of an unfamiliar activity.

The flipside of this is how most go about normal day-to-day things: feeling uncomfortable but not uttering a word of it to others. A sort of comfort in residing in pain. But, now that trust has been established we find ourselves willing to be authentic, and vulnerable. Researcher and author Brene Brown says, "Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they are never weakness."

The courage exhibited by our group brought us to a peak. A true peak in the summit of our hike, and a figurative peak in our experience as well. As we collectively chose to establish a radically authentic environment, we felt acceptance — acceptance from one another and acceptance of ourselves. Powerful. How powerful it is to be genuine — genuine to the hurt, the pain, the sadness, the grief, the loss, the hope, and the joy. To be fully visible, and fully seen.

As men we are often placed in environments where we are expected to be something. But here in this moment we have stepped into being just us. The unique us that are flawed, hurt, healing, lovable, caring, and genuine. This outward display of acceptance by our gathering of men opened the door for us to accept ourselves. Accepting our stories and our brokenness. Ultimately each of our experiences has shaped us.

Like currents that reshape stone, the power of a man sharing openly and honestly has a power that can change the world around him. Every man's eyes in this gathering now look at a world that embraces him in a real and authentic way.

John Muir said it well, "In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks." And we agree. ★

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



We invite you to share an adventure with your TAPS family at an upcoming Expedition. For more information, visit TAPS.org/Expeditions.

TAPS Family



Left to right, from top: The TAPS Family came together at the Western Regional Seminar, City of Industry, CA. TAPS Board Member Steve Cannon and surviving kids at the Atlanta United (MLS) Military Appreciation Game. Smiles and sharing at the TAPS Midwest Regional Seminar, Cleveland, OH. Military Mentor and child sharing special time at the TAPS Western Regional Good Grief Camp, City of Industry, CA. TAPS Kids soaring to new heights at Space Camp-U.S. Space and Rocket Center, Huntsville, AL.

Album



Left to right, from top: Finding strength and confidence together at the Women's Empowerment Retreat. Pocono Mountains, PA. TAPS Survivors learning new culinary skills during the Las Vegas Military Survivor Experience compliments of the Robert Irvine Foundation. Survivors view a model of the future Raiders Stadium. Survivors sharing their experiences and finding support at a TAPS Regional Seminar. TAPS kids honoring their loved ones and having a once-in-a-lifetime experience at the the 2019 NBA Draft in Brooklyn, NY.

THE UNBROKEN CHAIN

A Commitment to Legacies, Each Other, and to “Making It”

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

It was August 1, 1971, and David Scott and James Irwin were ending their workday on the moon. They were finishing up experiments and facing what probably was, for astronauts of that era, a terribly difficult moment – parting with a one-of-a-kind flashy sports car (in this case, a moon rover).

While the mission itself involved highly specialized skills, precision calculations, and yes, I’ll say it, “the right stuff,” once they landed on the moon, a majority of the 18 1/2 hours they spent traipsing about consisted of picking up rocks, talking about picking up rocks, and talking to Houston about picking up rocks. In the air-to-ground transcript of the mission, there is also quite a bit of back and forth about who put what where in the moon rover.

Yet sometime between Day 6, Hour 23, Minute 55, when James Irwin climbed into his landing craft for the last time, and Day 7, Hour 0, Minute 2 when the pair of astronauts closed the door, Mission Commander David Scott did something I know all of us understand.

He secretly placed two things on the moon: one, an aluminum figurine called the Fallen Astronaut, and two, a plaque bearing the names of the American astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts who perished as part of the space program. He had carried it 238,900 miles.

I am certain that despite the weightlessness of orbit, the gravity of those names and the stories behind them did not change.

We, too, have names and stories. Like Commander Scott, we know something about long journeys, heaviness, and holding the important things close.

I’d like to say, “We come in peace,” but the truth is we come all jumbled up. We converge with this sort of emotional magma. For some it’s roiling, for some it’s cooled, hardened. We may be

lost, lonely, angry, scared, bitter, traumatized, sad — and we may also be healing. We may also be proud.

We come together as a family of survivors to honor our fallen, to grieve our dead, to insist that our country understand the cost of war and the price of peace.

As Americans, we have brought our dead even to the moon. We have scattered their ashes at sea, across the start lines of races. We have placed boots in their honor in fields across America, put their pictures on our TAPS family tree, run for them, climbed mountains to make them proud, raised their children, loved their dogs. We have whispered their names in remembrance circles, lit candles, smelled their clothes, and oh, how have we wished that things were different. We honor them for where they brought us, to this family — and we honor them with what we do now. The lives of those we love have pulled us together, and they will drive us onward.

Nine years before David Scott placed that plaque on the moon, President John F. Kennedy stood in Rice Stadium in Houston, Texas, and boldly proclaimed, “We choose to go to the moon.” Famously, and appropriately for our comparison today, he continued by saying, we choose it not because it is easy, but because it is hard.



PHOTO LEFT: FLICKR.COM/NASA JOHNSON; PHOTOS RIGHT: SANJA SUSIC, TAPS STAFF



Rising, literally, to the challenge of President Kennedy's words compelled the best minds, most courageous pilots, and strongest families. It demanded unity of purpose. Each scientist, engineer, and mathematician redefined the applications of materials and numbers. Each aviator (and one chimpanzee) hurtled atop millions of pounds of explosive into uncharted territory. They were all dedicated to going the distance. They were committed to "making it" — no matter how largely the gap loomed between what was required and what was known.

How similar it is for us. How vast seem the expanses of living lifetimes without our loved ones. Grief is demanding, and our resources are limited.

What strength will we need tomorrow? How long will it feel this shaky? Will we ever feel at home again? Both space travel and grief can seem a lonely and dangerous enterprise. Both forever alter our perspective and how we see our home. Both require us to embrace a challenge for which we are not ready.

Yet, in each we are compelled to keep reaching toward the heavens.

Neither the exploration of space, nor grief is an odyssey that can be undertaken alone. In order to stand with any degree of confidence on that cusp between what we knew then and what we know now, we must rely on people we trust.

This journey does not ever have to be yours alone.

For 30 years, Dr. Guenther Wendt led launch operations at the Kennedy Space Center oriented around a principle he called "the unbroken chain." Each part of the project was tied to what came before and what came after: no link unimportant — no contribution insignificant. The flight directors of mission control were the voices in the dark; the engineers were the troubleshooters and problem solvers. Katherine Johnson, who was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, performed the calculations that allowed John Glenn

(Continued on page 15)

THIS JOURNEY DOES NOT EVER HAVE TO BE YOURS ALONE.





(Continued from page 14)

to confidently orbit the earth — trusting all the while that he was equipped with the absolute best everyone had to offer. In order to go confidently, to dare greatly, to move beyond the broken planets of our own losses, we are called — honored — to give nothing less than our best to each other.

And so it is with us. When we flirt with leaning in to the persistent panic, we turn to trusted voices. We are each other's best hopes.

We are a family because we have not been defeated by war, grief, terrorism, mental illness, or the limitations of the human body. We're a family because someone else wasn't defeated by those either.

We form the unbreakable chain: holding each other together, keeping alive the mission to become better, to raise families, to grow and heal as much as we can — not because it is easy, but because it is hard.



Look for this evidence. Watch for the ways that the universe allows us to bear witness for each other — the ways you become surprised by how you have been prepared for this, the way others have forged ahead so they can show you that it's possible. Open yourself to a deeper understanding of the unbroken chain: out of sight is never out of mind; “beyond visual range” is only that; when our loved ones aren't here with us, still they can count on us. The unbroken chain — each of us, our griefs and our glories — impact those around us. The unbroken chain: we draw on the strength of those who have come before us and we, in turn, can inspire and support those who will come after. The unbroken chain — even though our loved ones, like the astronauts, have slipped the surly bonds of earth, there is something ineffable that connects us to each other and to them.

the battlefields of men and mind, out of the rubble of bombed buildings and toward a new frontier of perspective and healing.

We will move forward as those before us have moved forward, and — in so doing — we will pave the way for those who may come after us. We will make the unspoken fears of military service faceable. We will be the best versions of the worst-case scenarios. We will not be afraid to continue into the uncertain future because we know that we are connected to our TAPS family, to our fallen heroes, to the long history of strong and brave men and women who have served this country. We bear witness for every family that has walked the tightrope between homecoming and heartbreak. We share a sacred understanding with everyone who has watched and waited, worried and wept. We ground each other, we support each other, and together we show everyone what military families can do.

We hold each other together and we keep the mission alive—not because it is easy, but because it is hard.

Endeavor to stand firm. Discover new strength in yourself. Reach out to each other. Commit to going through the darkness, pioneering your way through the unknown, and sharing your journey with your crew. We dispel our doubts, and those of others, by living with powerful commitment to something larger than ourselves. And just like with the space program, the strength of our bonds, the integrity of our own links allows our heroes to fly, unfettered. And death shall have no dominion.

Twenty-four people have seen the far side of the moon from orbit. For the period that each was in that unknown darkness, their communications with Earth were completely inoperable. They floated into a pristine, somber, unknowable silence. They relied on each other, their systems, their trust that everyone had done the best they could. The first time the Apollo 8 astronauts lost contact with Houston, the spacecraft commander said, “We'll catch you on the other side.”

When we forge and strengthen the bonds of survivorship, we face the hard battles, the uncertain futures, the yawning uncharted spaces. We serve this country courageously so that others will not be afraid to do so.

Let us bind ourselves to each other and to the strength that our loved ones imparted. Let us commit ourselves to “making it” — to pulling ourselves and each other above the grim finalities of flesh and bone, beyond

And so we will. Until then, the chain remains unbroken. Our heroes are remembered every time we look around us, and every time we look to the moon. May it be so now—and always. ✨



I Walk These Woods

Edward Dixon | Surviving father of SSgt. Edward F. Dixon, III, U.S. Army, and Misty Dawn Dixon

*I walk these woods
when I need to be near you.
I take a walk in a wooded area near our house.
I walk the paths you used to walk.
I walk along the stream you used to swim.
I walk under the trees and into the clearings where you
and your friends used to have your adventures.
I walk these places, because I know of no other place that I can go,
so I can feel you walking next to me and hear you laughing and
yelling as your spirit is still having childhood adventures.
I will walk these woods as long as I can
and as long as they are here.
I love you son,*

DAD

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

Sharing Music, A Message, and Finding an Open Forum to Heal

Ryan Weaver | Surviving brother of Chief Warrant Officer Aaron A. Weaver
and Surviving brother-in-law of Chief Warrant Officer 2 Randy Billings



KNOWING THERE IS A PLACE YOU CAN GO FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT, EVEN IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TYPE OF SUPPORT YOU NEED, IS A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE. IT WAS FOR ME.

Have you ever walked in to a room since you've lost your loved one and felt that anyone, much less everyone, really grasped how much you've been through? How many times have you felt strongly, if not more, for someone else's loss that you focused on their loss as much as your own, even if for a second? Can you remember the last time the heart of the person hugging you knew what it feels like to beat while broken just as much as yours, and it actually made you smile?

If you haven't experienced these things I've mentioned, they may seem all but impossible. Some might feel those experiences may somehow take away from how much their lost loved one meant to them. After all, I remember saying to myself, "I can't allow myself to hurt less because I don't want to feel as if I loved (my brothers) any less."

We all have felt sympathy from people who care about our losses, but only a small percentage of the U.S. population has served in the military, and we all know how difficult it is to find someone outside of that group to truly understand. Imagine a world where you don't have to search for an empathetic heart. How amazing that would be, right?

As a country music artist, I have spent the last 13+ years selling myself to an audience. I've performed in front of crowds of 2 people to over 40,000 in the biggest arenas across the nation. Those aren't bragging rights; that is my reality. To me, those two people were just as important as the large crowds. The 1% of on-stage concert glitz and glamour is built from the other 99 percent of my time trying to get people, who for the most part have no realistic idea what truly drives me, to

actually care about my music and message. Ironically, when I'm on stage I spend the last 1% of my time still trying to get the audience to care about my music and message. For the first time in 13 years in Arlington, Virginia, I stood on stage singing my songs without needing an explanation to get my point across. Thirteen years.

I can't count the number of interviews I've done wondering if people listening would see my world clearly as I talked about my time in service, in combat, and the moments I've spent with and without my brothers. There have been so many conversations with patriotic supporters about what it meant to lose my brothers only to leave their company feeling like they had absolutely no understanding. After all, how could they?

With a total of 20 years, 8 months and 7 days as an active duty military intelligence analyst turned chief warrant officer, and Black Hawk aviator, I served along side so many great people. This included my two brothers, Aaron and Steve, my brother-in-law, Randy (all fellow Army aviators) and my sister, Regina in the Air Force. Sacrifice was not foreign to our family, as we all spent time deployed overseas in the fight against terror.

Unfortunately, just like most of you reading this, we experienced the ultimate sacrifice that completely turned our worlds upside down. If stories from other survivors are tough to bear, please skip down a couple of paragraphs now. However, in order to truly touch your heart, I felt I needed to add what happened to our family. I've always promised myself when given a stage or a platform to speak

I would continue talking about my brothers. I believe in keeping promises.

My brother Aaron was a non-deployable cancer survivor who was in Iraq on a waiver he personally requested that was contingent on in-theater bi-monthly blood screenings to monitor his cancer status. On January 8, 2004, as a passenger in a medevac helicopter on the way to one of those screenings, he was killed in action when an enemy combatant shot it out of the sky with a shoulder-fired surface-to-air-missile. I was also deployed in Iraq and flew my last mission, and for the last time ever in a Black Hawk, that very same day. In a twist of fate, I was scheduled to fly over that very spot just a few days before when my battalion commander made me change my flight plan, and I took a different route. I live gratefully with that memory every single time I open my eyes in the morning and in my dreams at night.

As tough and rare as one loss is, and such a sudden loss already bringing pain down so mercilessly on our family, on December 17, 2013, my brother-in-law, Randy Billings, was piloting a Black Hawk in Afghanistan when it too was taken out of the sky. All but one passenger on board were killed, making us a two-time Gold Star Family. Being a recipient family to a military funeral was horrible. Two military funerals were indescribably yet ironically surreal. Knowing there were others who could grasp the gravity of our losses was unimaginable.

I didn't know what TAPS was really about until I walked uncomfortably, and apprehensively, into a room with hundreds of survivors just like me. Standing in the back of the room watching others, survivor after survivor passed by me with a warm, welcoming smile. Knowing who was in the room, I immediately felt a sense of belonging in a completely different way than before. Even then, I was still somewhat closed off.

As the weekend progressed, I established more and more relationships with fellow survivors with so many stories. The commonality, ironically a positive thing, was our losses. Despite my very personal knowledge and feelings about my losses, I found those connections actually opened my heart (in an incredibly healing way) to understanding more, and listening more, about others as they spoke passionately about their loved ones. Then something amazing happened: I began to *know* I was not alone.

This is where not knowing what you don't know comes in to play. Many of us know there are people and programs that can help, and we may even know what those programs are about. Sometimes it takes a strong dose of good reality to show us what we have been missing in our lives because we were hesitant to open ourselves up to healing.

Sure, I knew there were others out there like me, but I never really knew in my heart that I was not alone in my losses. Survivors of all types — combat loss, suicide, accidents to toxic exposure (something I never really even thought about) — all told me their stories, and as much as I thought for years that hearing these stories would make my loss feel worse, they did just the opposite. These vulnerable, yet genuine moments made me want to share my stories more openly without worry of judgment or lack of understanding. For one of the few times, with exception to speaking with other surviving families in my country music journey, I found an open forum to heal.

There are many different sides to my personality, and those close to me know I'm not very good in crowds unless I'm "on" as an artist. Public situations as an artist are easy for me, but if I am in a crowd of strangers in personal situations, I become extremely anxious.

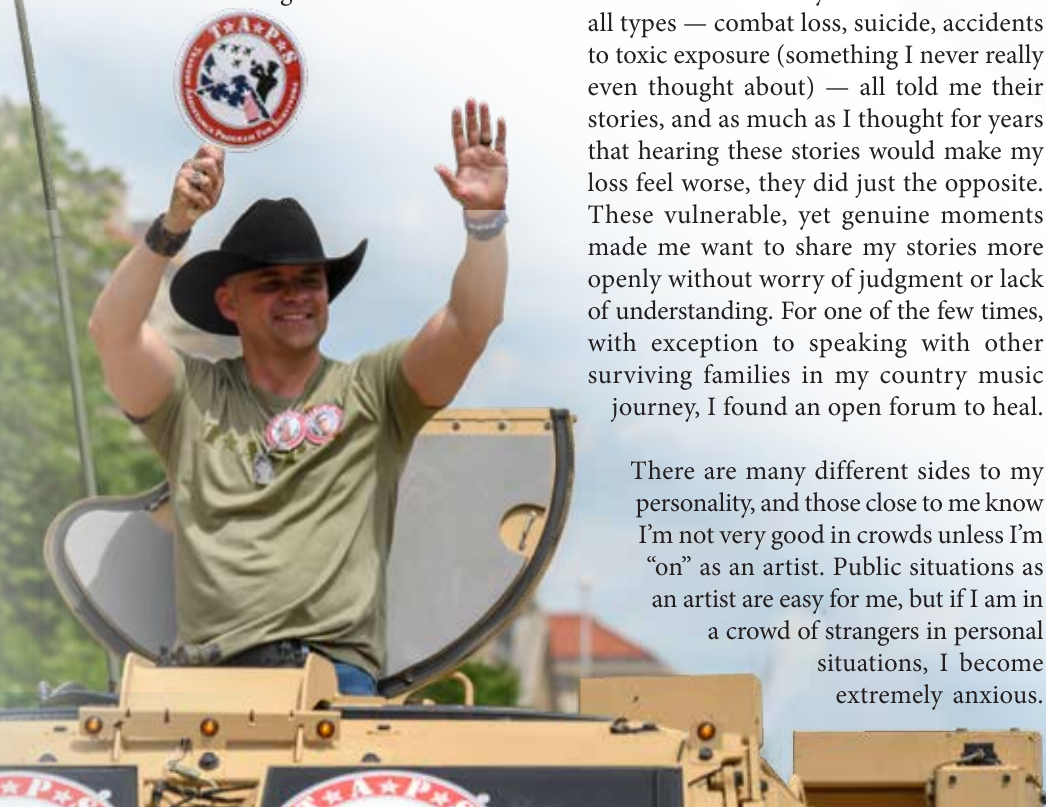


In this circumstance I only knew a couple of people personally, but I felt a sense of calm I couldn't explain, yet gladly welcomed. Familiarity on a completely different level was something I didn't know I was missing, and I found it in a place that, for many years, caused anxiety. Once again, you don't know what you don't know.

"So I take the pain, and I push it down, even though it hurts like the day I found out you were gone," are lyrics to part of the chorus in my song "What You Think of Me." We all have done it for our own reasons, and we all deal with our losses differently. We all want to feel both understood and that we are not alone. Knowing there is a place you can go for understanding and support, even if you don't know what type of support you need, is a life-changing experience. It was for me.

I didn't know such a strong healing power existed before my weekend with TAPS. Now I know there's a place where all survivors can go to heal by openly, without reservation, spending time with other survivors. The hugs — every hug — are priceless, even when you don't know you need one. After 13 years, I finally sang my heart out knowing it was protected by those who felt the same. You can too. ★

Ryan Weaver is a high-energy, all-American, rockin' country music artist who proudly served as an active duty Black Hawk aviator, chief warrant officer 3 in the U.S. Army. Weaver began his music career in 2005 while still on active duty, playing the club and festival circuit throughout the southeast. His performances are known for their unique blend of high-octane original songs and rockin' cover material combined with a heartfelt message and genuine humor. Find out more about Ryan and his music at weavercountry.com



Baseball Was There As My Refuge

By Soo Kim, surviving spouse of Cmdr. Scott Kim, U.S. Coast Guard



Soo Kim has fond memories of attending games with her husband, Scott, and their children. They attended a game at Nationals Park a few weeks before Scott passed away.

After the death in June of Tyler Skaggs, a starting pitcher for the Los Angeles Angels, team manager Brad Ausmus talked about what it's like to play baseball when a teammate suddenly dies.

“Once the game starts, it’s actually a refuge because it takes your mind off it, distracts you for a little while,” he said. “When you go back to your hotel room, you’re reminded of reality.” He was referring to the death of a teammate 17 years earlier, and he was faced with the identical feeling about losing Skaggs. He needed to go on managing his grieving players while dealing with his own sadness.

This interview so vividly reminded me of my own experience from 2014. My husband, Scott, died that July in an unexpected drowning accident. After the kids and I returned home to Virginia in

early August after having buried Scott in California, we watched the Nationals play every night they were on TV that season, until their last game in early October. I found such refuge in watching these games, whether the Nationals were winning or losing, because I was able to escape from my reality of not having Scott on earth. With a beer in my hand, I just fixated on each ball thrown, each play made, almost in a state of trance.

I still clearly remember feeling extremely panicked when that season was over. I thought, “Oh no, how do I endure the long, bewitching evening hours alone now?”

I still feel a sensation of slight panic every time a baseball season ends. Of course that sensation is far less intense, but I always think, “Oh, now what?” when October comes around.



Soo Kim, center, who lost her husband in July 2014, enjoyed a 2015 Washington Nationals game with her children, Annelise and Elliott, along with other survivors and the teams4taps staff.

I remember all the players on the Nationals roster in 2014, and whenever I see those players on TV, even for a rival team, I feel drawn to them in a sad and nostalgic way.

That winter after Scott died was brutal. We had multiple snowstorms in Virginia of rare intensity and length, and I remember that as one of the darkest and the longest of winters I have ever endured. Or, maybe it was a typical Virginia winter but felt more dreadful to me because I was in the deep trenches of grieving the loss of my love. I remember often wishing for a baseball game on TV during that winter.

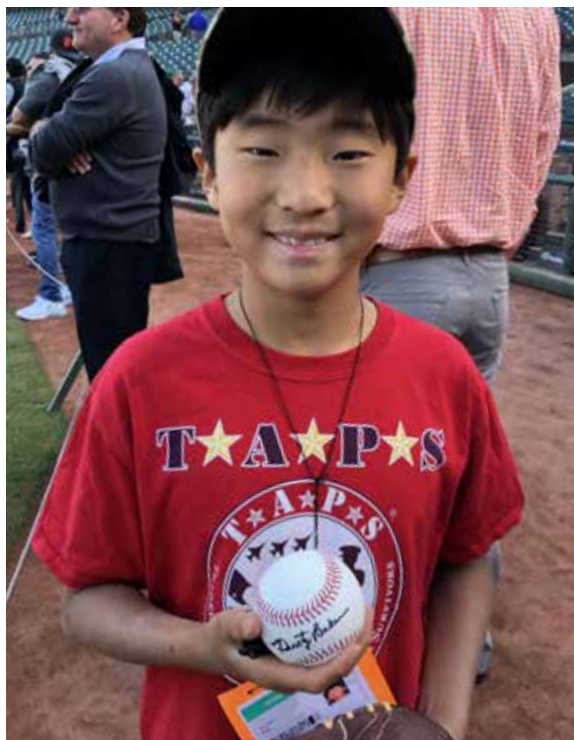
As spring 2015 arrived, teams4taps offered to take us to a Nationals game, where we could spend time with other TAPS families who knew exactly what we were going through. Although it made us long for Scott, it helped us feel that it was OK to be excited and happy again.

Spending time with other surviving families was a huge gift to us, whether at a game, a TAPS Care Group, or at the National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. These events helped us feel strength and hope as we connected with other TAPS families. They gave us much-needed relief from the burden of our new reality and allowed us to feel a sense of pure joy despite the loss of our beloved Scott. This was an important affirmation we desperately needed especially during that first year.

Later that summer, we moved to Northern California to be near family and where we had buried Scott.

I am probably always going to be a Nationals fan. I still watch most of their games, at least a few innings on my phone before I go to sleep. I feel indebted to them for providing me with an incredible break from the exhausting grief during those first few months after losing Scott. I am thankful that baseball was there as my refuge.

Teams4taps is one way TAPS has helped us stay connected in our new home on the West Coast, where we got to see the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland A's



Elliott received an autographed baseball from former Nationals manager Dusty Baker during a game in San Francisco.



Since moving to Northern California, Soo and her children continue to find comfort in baseball and had the opportunity to honor Scott in 2018 during a game at the San Francisco Giants' AT&T Park.

play each other in the Battle of the Bay game. Most importantly, these games have allowed us an extra special time to honor and remember our Scott, who loved cheering on his favorite teams.

In July, Patrick Corbin pitched fiercely for the Nationals while wearing the No. 45 to

honor his good friend Skaggs. I wonder if Corbin found solace in the game as he mourned the loss of his friend.

My wish for all survivors is that we find moments of refuge in the things God bestows on us as we walk through this arduous life's journey. ★

teams4taps

Honor and Healing on the Diamond

BASEBALL — OUR NATIONAL PASTIME

OVER THE YEARS WE'VE CHEERED FOR OUR FAVORITE TEAMS AND PLAYERS. WE HAVE WORN JERSEYS, T-SHIRTS AND CAPS TO SHOW OUR SPIRIT AND PRIDE. BASEBALL BRINGS TO MIND CHERISHED MEMORIES SHARED WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

“Our heroes are not forgotten, if only for one day we are again able to tell others about the courage, selflessness, dedication, and love that guided our loved ones' lives.”

*~ Robert Wichmann,
TAPS peer mentor and
surviving father of U.S. Army
Sgt. Grant Arthur Wichmann*

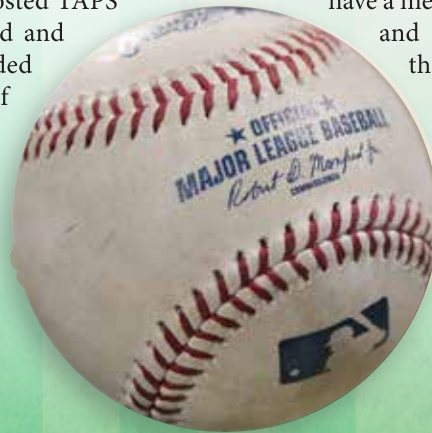


Since the inception of teams4taps in 2013, the teams, players, coaches, and fans of Major League Baseball have welcomed hundreds of TAPS families at ballparks across the country where those memories were recalled and new, exciting memories were created.

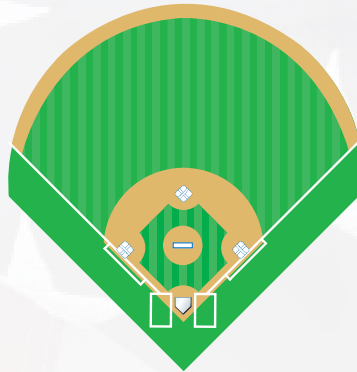
Throughout the 2019 season, survivors have shared incredible experiences provided by host teams, players, and their families. Some of the most special moments were created on the Memorial Day and July 4th holidays. On Memorial Day this year, nine teams hosted TAPS families. Stories were shared and these families were surrounded by the heartfelt support of the baseball community. A favorite player wearing the name of a military member on their cleats, participating in flag ceremonies during

the playing of the National Anthem, starting the game with the announcement “Play Ball,” and seeing their loved one’s picture and name on the jumbotron. Time and time again this season, families were strengthened by the knowledge their loved ones are honored and their sacrifices are remembered.

Time at the ballpark has also opened important doors for survivors – creating a relaxed and safe space that has encouraged some to participate for the first time at a TAPS event. Families come together and are able to have a meaningful experience and conversations with their peers. Survivors of all ages are able to find renewed hope in a community where they do not feel alone in their grief. ★



Many of our survivors have shared their photos and stories from the baseball season.



Robert Wichmann, TAPS peer mentor and surviving father of U.S. Army Sgt. Grant Arthur Wichmann, was one of 10 TAPS family members who attended the Colorado Rockies Memorial Day game courtesy of relief pitcher Mike Dunn and the Rockies organization. He presented Dunn with a TAPS coin. "I met the families of two other servicemen, and we shared the joy of their lives with each other and with members of the Rockies organization."



The Houston Astros saluted ten of our nation's fallen heroes and their families on Memorial Day, even live streaming it via Facebook, so fans at home could watch. TAPS families lined up on the 1st and 3rd baselines while their loved ones names and photos were shared on the jumbotron at Minute Maid Park. Waving to the crowd is Kendra Wilson-Hudson, surviving sister of U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Donald La'Shon "Shon" Wilson.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HOUSTON ASTROS



Brooke Nyren, TAPS legacy mentor and surviving daughter of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Nathaniel Nyren, was invited by the Baltimore Orioles to perform 'God Bless America' in honor of her father during the seventh-inning stretch on Memorial Day. Brooke, attended the game with her mother, Courtney, and other family members, said, "Growing up, I was in Camden Yards every season with my dad. We had so much fun going to games rain or shine. After he died, I did not have many opportunities to go to Camden Yards Orioles ballpark. TAPS has given me the chance to get back to my favorite ballpark. Singing is one of my biggest passions in life, so being able to sing in one of my favorite places was the coolest experience I have ever had. Hearing my dad's name echo throughout the park and seeing his photo on the big screen filled my heart with so much joy. I want to thank TAPS and the Baltimore Orioles for giving me the opportunity to go back to Camden Yards so that I can relive some of my favorite memories I have with my dad."



Through the generosity of the Home Base Foundation, TAPS was honored to be invited to attend the Red Sox / Yankees London Series in June. Tessa Wise and her son, David, who live in the United Kingdom, were excited to share in the joy of America's pastime in London.



Kansas City relief pitcher Ian Kennedy and his wife, Allison, have hosted TAPS families at four games between the 2017 and 2019 seasons. The Kennedy family believes in giving back to their community and always create a very special experience for TAPS families.



Do you have a special memory of your loved one's favorite sports team or player? We would love to hear from you and be able to include you in future events. Contact us at: teams4taps@taps.org

Opening Your Mind and Body to Heal

Massage Therapy and Working Through Grief

Diane Ryan, LMT | Surviving ex-spouse of Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Raymon A. Woolery

Google “massage therapy benefits” and you discover over 100 million results on different techniques and the benefits to your physical and psychological health. Studies have shown the importance and effectiveness of massage therapy on those dealing with health issues causing inflammation, pain, fatigue, and anxiety.

However, when I experienced the loss of my former spouse, if well-intentioned family or friends had suggested I have a massage to help my grief, I would have told them I have no interest. It was not a method I thought of to help my emotional grief and physical pain. The only touch I longed for was from a person who could no longer be there to offer it.

I developed a “frozen shoulder” from no apparent cause, and the condition was limiting my range of motion. Physical therapy wasn’t enough so I sought help from a recommended therapeutic massage therapist. I looked forward to the academic process of this massage, the “fixing,” so I could resume my “have to’s” in life. What transpired astonished me. As the massage therapist worked with my shoulder I had

a deep emotional reaction. It was as if the muscles in my shoulder were literally holding the grief I had in my heart; holding on so tight that the physical result was keeping my shoulder, and probably my grief process, stunted and frozen. This massage was a turning point for me. My muscles had begun to wake up, and I was allowing the reconnection to my mind. I learned so much about the powerful connection between our minds, our emotions, and the manifestations in our bodies.

GRIEF’S EFFECTS ON THE BODY

What we feel, experience, and interpret with our minds will have an effect on our bodies. This has never been more evident to me when I experienced my loss.

When we are first launched into grief, our bodies respond in a way to protect us. This is a completely automatic response from our brain when we are threatened in some way; we are reflexively dropped into a fight-or-flight mode.

Emotions of extreme loss, heartache, and shock are interpreted by the body as

trauma. Chemicals and hormones flood our bodies in an effort to maintain balance within our systems and keep us going.

Unfortunately, when the release of these chemicals does not subside, as is often the case with extreme stress, there is a severe disruption of balance within our systems. We may have trouble sleeping and low energy. Often we feel that we might be getting sick, have muscle aches, digestive problems, sensitivity to noise, heart palpitations, headaches, and changes in appetite and weight. This is by no means a comprehensive list, and it is different for everyone.

When our bodies are kept in a constant state of stress, the hormone cortisol, for example, can be responsible for a decrease in our immune system, weight fluctuations, higher blood pressure, and the feeling of not being able to think clearly. Remarkably, our bodies can intuitively and reflexively re-balance. Supporting the body with this process of re-balancing is vital. It determines how well, and often times, how quickly we can get back to a state of well-being in our body, mind, and spirit.



My body was a direct reflection of my mind's and heart's desire to not move.

ALLOWING MOVEMENT WHEN GRIEF KEEPS US FROZEN

Our bodies are designed to be in motion. All of the processes within our bodies are based on movement. While many do not think of “movement” when booking a massage, initiating movement is precisely what massage does for your body. Massage therapy is by definition, “the systematic manual manipulation of soft tissue to enhance health and well-being.”¹ Through this manipulation, our systems are instructed to re-organize and reset.

Stress in our bodies creates a state of non-movement. This is precisely what I experienced with my shoulder. Despite my best attempts, I was only addressing the physical aspect. My body was a direct reflection of my mind's and heart's desire to not move. Direct therapeutic touch coaxed my body out of its frozen state.

As a result of my own experience, I have become passionate about massage therapy as part of a healthcare regimen. Massage improves the blood and lymph circulation allowing more oxygen to be delivered, and in turn helps the immune system be more effective.

In grief, our normal self-care routines are broken. Soon we realize our bodies and spirit are worn down and exhausted. The thought of going for a simple walk, getting back to the gym, or just stepping outside can feel daunting. Having always been an extremely active person, I struggled resuming my physical routine.

Although it was a physical ailment that brought me to massage, as I continued I found I would allow myself to be deeply present in my body, feeling very safe and taken care of. Massage therapy is an option and available opportunity for helping the body heal while under such an enormous stress, allowing us to “power down” for a block of time, and feeling a sense of well-being and release.

UNCONDITIONAL TOUCH AND THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Human contact, touch, closeness — study after study has shown that animals and humans alike need touch to develop and thrive. But, do we really think about how much touch we have in our lives? We live in a time of “personal space,” “boundaries,” and illnesses spread by simple human contact. When we are grieving, pulling into ourselves seems natural, and we have our reasons, whether it is to spare ourselves or spare those around us. Hugs from well-meaning friends are not the same and perhaps now touch has become a grief trigger.

I began denying myself what I give so passionately to others. Touch had become a trigger for me and when I would openly and honestly receive a hug, I fought back pain and tears. The first relaxing massage I had after my loss, I found myself realizing I had not allowed touch to resonate within me. I did not want any memories, more tears, and more pain to come flooding in. In turn, I had not allowed relaxation within.

So many of us “brace” our bodies in ways we are not even aware of, just as I was also doing. And I immediately learned how massage therapy can be a catalyst in the healing journey. It may seem very counterintuitive, almost unnatural, and difficult to allow yourself to receive a massage when you are grieving, however the benefits are truly immeasurable.

Skin is our body's largest organ, and a touch on the skin has a ripple effect on every aspect of our being. A simple touch activates our neurotransmitters, the chemical messengers in our nervous system that control our bodies' functions. They help with movement, being more productive, feeling balanced, combating pain, and just feeling well.

HEALING BODY AND MIND WITH MASSAGE THERAPY

We, as human beings, are beautifully and efficiently constructed, experiencing our lives within our minds, our bodies, and our consciousness. However, each facet of our being is not separate. What we outwardly live, we inwardly process, and then our physical bodies are a reflection of this. We depend on our systems to work seamlessly together. When loss comes into our world, our entire being feels attacked. We seek answers on all levels and struggle to nourish ourselves. As a survivor myself, and working with survivors, I know grief and physical pain are true struggles. They do not leave us, they become an integral part of us. We learn to live with the pain on all levels, and it changes as time carries us forward. And, despite the devastation around and within us, I continue to witness and experience the healing effects that massage therapy has on a person's entire being. The touch experienced through massage therapy is a modality of healthcare that has the ability to lead us back to our complete selves when we are shattered by loss and grief. ★

Diane Ryan is a licensed massage therapist in Wellington, Colorado and the surviving ex-spouse of Sgt. Raymon Woolery of the Army National Guard. With 14 years experience as an EMT and now specializing in clinical massage, she is using her experience and expertise to bring awareness, education, and treatment of massage therapy to active military, veterans, and those seeking care in the greater Northern Colorado area. Diane is also a TAPS peer mentor.



1. Moyer CA, Rounds J, Hannum JW. A meta-analysis of Massage Therapy research, Psychol Bull. 2004; 130(1):3-18

FINDING PEACE, ONE PIECE AT A TIME

Author Rachel Kodanaz; Reviewed by Amy Tucci | TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing

In life, we refer to our loved one's possessions as their stuff and things. In death, they signify forever connections to cherished memories. – Rachel Kodanaz

Rachel Kodanaz, whose husband, Rod, died suddenly when she was 31, knows of what she writes in her new and immensely helpful book, *Finding Peace, One Piece at a Time*.

Kodanaz found intense meaning and intimacy in Rod's belongings following his death: his coffee cup, his road race T-shirts, even his toothbrush. For months, she kept his running shoes where he had always left them, right next to the front door.

Anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one will understand the profound attachment to his or her possessions after death and the emotional difficulties involved in deciding what to do with those items and when to do it.

Like grief, which is a uniquely individual experience, Kodanaz underscores that survivors will have different attachments and responses to their loved one's possessions. Like grieving, she says, there is no "right" way to do things, no prescribed timeline to clean out the closet, sort through papers, preserve voice mails and social media memories, or to repurpose things in a newly useful way.

While she does not write an exact prescription to follow, her book offers a practical guide for survivors of loss looking to approach the task that most dread while feeling satisfied that the meaningful things of their loved one's life have ultimately found the right home.

With the "Ten Essentials," Kodanaz gives useful tips including prioritizing, how to

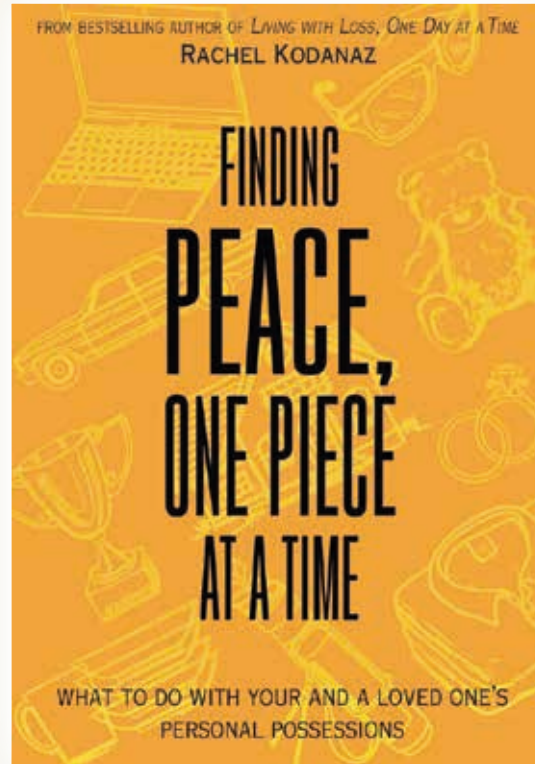
make a game plan (such as moving from right to left in a drawer or room), and how to identify the people who can be useful support systems in the process. But she notes that nothing needs to be done in one day; nor does the process need to be linear. After all, Kodanaz writes, while she began donating Rod's work suits not long after his death, she kept their daughter's crib for 13 years before donating it to a charitable organization. The crib had become a symbol of intense meaning; it was where Rod had last kissed their 2-year-old daughter goodbye.

A popular workshop speaker for years at the annual TAPS National Survivor Seminar, Kodanaz in her book recalls attending the seminar and spotting a mother who had repurposed her son's fatigues, medals, and nametag to make a beautiful day bag that she

carried. "The greatest gift from repurposing his belongings was the number of complete strangers asking questions about her son, just as I had. It was truly a special recognition and a great transformation of a uniform that would have otherwise remained in a box in the top of a closet."

Decluttering has become a popular topic lately, made popular by the KonMari Method,[™] which promises to help you organize your sock drawer, home, and your life at the same time by asking yourself if your possessions spark joy.

For Kodanaz, the question about "things" runs much deeper. The question she wants readers to be able to answer after reading her book is, "By keeping this item, how do I keep my love one's memory alive in a significant and meaningful way?" ★



➤ To learn more about Rachel and her books, visit rachelkodanaz.com

TAPS Online Store

taps.org/shop

1.



2.



- 1. "Love Lives On" Metal Wall Art - Framed \$75 Unframed \$45
- 2. Long Floral Scarf - \$20
- 3. Women's Fitted 1/2 Zip Pullover - \$45
- 4. Men's Stretch 1/2 Zip Pullover - \$45
- 5. Hair Scrunchie, Red & Navy Blue - \$5 each
- 6. Heart Hugger Button - \$4
- 7. Red, White & Blue TAPS Leggings - \$45
- 8. Lightweight Windbreaker - \$45

3.



4.

5.



6.



7.



8.



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, on weekends, holidays or even in the middle of a busy day. Our Helpline is answered live by TAPS at all times — 24/7/365 — with comfort and care from peer professionals who ensure the caller has open access to all that TAPS provides, including casework, peer support, community based resources, and more. Whether you have an emotional crisis, need to connect with TAPS resources, find information or want to speak with someone and share, the TAPS Helpline is here for you. Call 800-959-TAPS (8277).

Peer Mentor Network

Survivors helping survivors — that is the foundation of TAPS. Through our peer mentor network, you will have a supportive companion as you navigate

the aftermath of loss. Survivors who are at least 18 months beyond their loss volunteer their time and receive training to be a supportive presence for new survivors — offering a listening ear and a source of encouragement to the newly bereaved. You can share with someone who has also experienced military loss and find strength and hope knowing you are not alone. peer mentors also lend support at TAPS events throughout the year. Find out more: taps.org/peermentors.

Casework Assistance

Managing paperwork and unexpected needs that may arise can add to the weight of grief and loss. Our casework team delivers compassionate assistance for all the needs a family may have, including access to pro bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, information on state and federal benefits, and connections to

private social services support. Find out more: taps.org/casework.

Education Support Services

Need guidance for post-secondary education scholarship and benefit information? Our education support coordinators can work with you to access resources and provide you with tools to help you step confidently toward your education goals. Find out more: taps.org/edu.

Connections to Grief Counseling and Local Support Groups

TAPS provides connection to free and unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources and local support groups. We can assist in finding the right grief counselor to help you develop coping skills, work through questions and navigate the myriad of emotions associated with grief and loss. We also rely on a large network of strong



community partners to help locate support groups in your community. We perform careful research and compile resources that provide a source of support close to home. Find out more: taps.org/griefcounseling.

Suicide Loss Support

A death by suicide can leave behind a wake of emotions that complicate an 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 they have a safe space within TAPS to remember, honor and grieve their loved one’s entire story. Special programming and resources, including the annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, provide gentle, understanding support as we work through the emotions associated with this type of loss. As peers, we want you to know that you can and will survive this. You are not alone and we will be by your side, offering comfort, care and hope. Find out more: taps.org/suicideloss.

Connect Online

The TAPS Online Community offers the ability to connect you with other survivors from the comfort of home. Wherever you are within your grief you can find support, encouragement and learn how others are coping with loss. Video and text chat sessions, message boards, blogs, weekly communications and peer-based sharing groups give you a variety of ways to strengthen your support network. You can participate at your comfort level – actively share or just listen/read the input of others and know that you are not alone. Find out more: taps.org/onlinecommunity.

Youth/Young Adult Programs

Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health and education, TAPS youth programs — including Good Grief Camps, summer campouts, teen adventures and family retreats — provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing. Activities and programs have also been developed for young adults (ages 18-25) based on personal and career development, financial stability, communication and service to others. Young adults strengthen



bonds and build solid foundations as they move into adulthood. Find out more: taps.org/youthprograms.

Toxic Exposure Loss Support

TAPS is leading the effort to ensure families whose loved one died from toxic exposure are recognized, cared for and aware of all benefits they are eligible to receive. Working to increase education about risks and effects of toxic exposure, raise awareness and help families navigate the benefits process after loss, TAPS will pull together relevant legislation, medical studies, expert testimonies, literature and reports to create a reference manual and a foundation for future advocacy. Find out more: Email info@taps.org.

TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing serves as a resource and training center. Through webinars, webcasts, workshops and events, the Institute educates survivors of loss as well as professionals who work in the area death notification, funerals and grief and bereavement support. For military loss survivors and other survivors, the Institute provides programs that foster hope and healing, such as understanding suicide; understanding children’s grief; practical tips for coping with grief; wellness workshops and creative ways to keep

the memories of loved ones alive. For professionals, the Institute offers academic programming taught by experts in the field. For these professionally oriented programs, continuing education credits are available from a wide range of health and social service professional boards. Find out more: taps.org/institute.

Publications

TAPS has created several proprietary publications to serve the survivor community, offer valuable information and inspiration. A series of pocket-size guides, with input by subject matter experts, offer insight and information on available resources and services. These guides are provided at no cost to survivors. Other publications include the book *Healing Your Grieving Heart after a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., the children’s book *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope* and *TAPS Magazine*. Find out more: taps.org/publications. ★



To learn more about the support waiting for you from your TAPS family, visit us online at taps.org or call the Helpline anytime at 800-959-TAPS (8277).



Capt. Jason Pak, U.S. Army (Ret)
*Director, Boeing veterans initiatives,
 mid-Atlantic region*

Capt. Jason Pak, U.S. Army (Ret.), is Boeing's director of veterans initiatives for the mid-Atlantic region. But his military life started as an Army brat who traveled the world with his family. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and deployed to Afghanistan in October 2012.

His life was forever changed when an IED blast claimed both his legs and two of his fingers.

Fast forward to 2019 and Jason is now shaping Boeing's support for military families throughout the United States. He helps guide the company's philanthropy, charitable partnerships, sponsorships and employee volunteer program to improve the lives of those in the military community.

"Mental health remains a primary focus for us," says Jason. "We decided to put a stake in the ground and say we are going to support direct programming to address this." Boeing believes that these efforts save lives by reaching and healing those with both visible and invisible wounds.

It was the combined advocacy of Jason Pak and Medal of Honor Recipient Florent Groberg, chief of staff for Boeing Commercial Airplanes, that brought the full support of Boeing to TAPS.

Jason personally saw how TAPS supports families of the fallen when an IED took the life of his close friend and West Point soccer teammate, Capt. Drew Ross, in Afghanistan last year. "He was very near and dear to me," Jason says. "It was a difficult time for all of us who knew him. I have come to appreciate the vital work of TAPS because I've seen it firsthand."

With Boeing's funding, TAPS unveiled the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing where TAPS is able to provide training for mental health professionals, bereavement and trauma specialists, volunteer peer mentors and military personnel who provide support and resources to surviving families following the death of a loved one.

In addition, Boeing's keen interest in the mental health of our military led them to support the work of TAPS Suicide Prevention and Postvention team.

On a recent visit, Jason explained, "Boeing is honored to partner with organizations that are committed to serving the families of those who have made the ultimate

sacrifice." He continued, "Our investment in TAPS will extend compassion and vital support services to those who have lost a family member in service to our nation."

Boeing has aligned itself with TAPS because we have demonstrated that we can drive measurable change and create a better world. Boeing employees have volunteered at TAPS Seminars around the country and have hosted families at company events. Boeing will host TAPS families at its Seattle headquarters in 2020.

"TAPS is grateful for Boeing's commitment to those who serve or have served in defense of freedom and those who grieve a fallen hero," said Bonnie Carroll, TAPS president and founder. "Through Boeing's grant, TAPS will be able to train and equip hundreds of professionals and volunteers to effectively support surviving military families and to employ best practices in identifying suicidal ideation and prevent suicide attempts."

"We will continue to grow our partnership in order to make the most impact that we can," Jason says. "I'm a veteran myself who has sustained injuries downrange. No matter what I do, for me, it's continuing to be the advocate—not just wearing my Boeing hat, but in general out in the community—an advocate for military families, taking care of service members and families of the fallen." ★



Boeing employees supporting TAPS kids at the 2019 National Good Grief Camp.



Mark C. Cherry, vice president and general manager of Phantom Works, Boeing Defense, Space & Security, attended the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar in 2019.

Join Your TAPS Family

TAPS INSTITUTE FOR
HOPE AND HEALING

OCT. 8, 2019
Supporting My School Aged
Children Throughout the
Grief Journey

LIVE WEBINAR

12:00 PM - 1:30 PM ET

OCT. 29, 2019
Providing Hope and Healing
to Those Coping with
Trauma and Loss

LIVE WEBINAR

12:00 PM-1:30 PM ET

Visit taps.org/institute
for more information

SEMINARS

» For more information, visit taps.org/events

OCT. 11-14, 2019
National Military Suicide Survivor
Seminar and Good Grief Camp
Phoenix, AZ

NOV. 22-24, 2019
Northeast Regional
Seminar and Good Grief Camp
New Brunswick, NJ

2020

FEB. 21-23
Southern Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Dallas, TX

AUG. 21-23
Midwest Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Columbus, OH

MARCH 27-29
Mountain Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Colorado Springs, CO

SEPT. 18-20
Northeast Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
East Brunswick, NJ

MAY 22-25
National Military Survivor Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Arlington, VA

OCT. (TBA)
National Military Suicide Survivor
Seminar and Good Grief Camp

JULY 10-12
Western Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Los Angeles, CA

NOV. 13-15
Central Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
St. Louis, MO





TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

3033 Wilson Boulevard, Third Floor
Arlington, VA 22201

NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
Stevens Point, WI
PERMIT NO. 272

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.



 TAPS is a participant organization in the Combined Federal Campaign, No. 11309

WANT TO HELP OTHER SURVIVORS KNOW THEY ARE NOT ALONE?

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.” ~ FRED ROGERS



ARE YOU 18 MONTHS BEYOND YOUR LOSS?

Be a comfort, Be a companion - Be a TAPS Peer Mentor

Find out more: visit taps.org/peermentors
or email peermentors@taps.org

