

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T * A * P * S[®]

Coping with the Holidays



VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 4

Winter Issue



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS, INC.

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



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ABOUT TAPS

TAPS Magazine is dedicated to the brave men and women who paid the ultimate price for freedom. 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.

Who We Are

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national non-profit 501(c)3 Veteran's Service Organization. TAPS is America's front line resource for all who are grieving the death of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces. Since 1994, TAPS has provided comfort and care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What We Do

The mission of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is to provide ongoing emotional help, hope, and healing to all who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died in military service to America. TAPS is dedicated to providing the best care possible by offering grief and trauma resources, casualty casework assistance, crisis response and intervention, and long-term peer-based emotional support to survivors regardless of relationship to the deceased, branch of service, or circumstances and geography of death.

TAPS

SUPPORTS the military family through a national network of those who have lost a loved one in the Armed Forces and are now standing by to lovingly reach out and support others when a death occurs.

OFFERS the very best resources available to military survivors across America, as part of a national network of grief support groups and services.

EDUCATES survivors about grief and the traumatic effects following the sudden death of a loved one. TAPS provides educational reading materials to help survivors realize that they are experiencing "normal reactions to abnormal events."

SPONSORS the National Military Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps in locations across America, designed to help rebuild shattered lives and give survivors the chance to help each other heal.

PUBLISHES a quarterly journal focusing on vital issues facing military survivors, sent free of charge to survivors, commanders, chaplains, casualty staff and care givers.

OPERATES a national toll-free help and information line 24 hours a day with support available through TAPS' Board of Advisors, leading experts in grief and trauma.

CARES about and supports all survivors including spouses, significant others, children, parents, siblings, friends and co-workers.

Call us for more information at 1-800-959-TAPS (8277) or visit us at www.TAPS.org.

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In accordance with our goal of compassionate care, TAPS seeks articles that reflect the theme: Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, Share 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, request permission to reprint a previously published article, or subscribe to TAPS Magazine, please email info@taps.org.

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“What is Christmas?

It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. It’s a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal, and that every path may lead to peace.”

- Agnes M Pharo -



COVER PHOTO

The horse-drawn funeral carriage carrying the body of Marine Pvt. Hearth Warner, 19, is driven along the Park of the Presidents on December 6, 2006 in Canton, Ohio. Scott and Melissa Warner. Copyright 2006. All Rights Reserved. Photo used with permission, and may not be copied without written permission from the Warner family.

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TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

**WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!
800-959-TAPS (8277)**

Marine Corps Marathon Forward: Mission Complete for T★A★P★S!

By Gunnery Sergeant Dustin R. Kazmar, USMC Camp Fallujah Iraq



On October 26, 2008, more than 6,000 miles away, hundreds of service members ran in the sands of Iraq to honor our Fallen Heroes. This is one Marine's amazing report.

Race day! I wake up at 0400 and jump in the shower to start my morning. While I am shaving I hear what sounds like thunder. Confused because it hasn't rained in Iraq for the last seven months, I poke my head outside and sure enough there is lightning in the sky and loud thunder to follow. I think, "There is no way it is going to RAIN!"

I have to check in no later than 0530 so I plan to step out at 0500. This is when it all starts. Drops of rain sound on the roof of my room, then a good amount of rain follows. I hope that it will soon stop so I don't have to get wet and start a 26.2 mile race with wet feet. The rain continues and I have no choice but to go check in. I leave my room around 0515 to jog to the gym in the rain, and when I arrive I am wet from head to toe. I check in, and start to think of ways to get a dry pair of socks. The race was to start at 0600. This didn't happen! The thunder and lightning increased, and the rain came down like no other. The race director postponed the race until 0615 and then 0645. At 0700 the decision was made to start the race!

We leave the gym and head outside to line up on a 3-foot section of road. In the rain there is no need for dry socks! To our right the rest of the road is flooded with ten inches of water. We are all standing there waiting for the gun to sound, and POP we are off. I am

soaked from head to toe before I even start! The crowd of runners is CRAZY! People are trying to stay out of the rivers of water that seem to come from everywhere. I am hopping over the streams, and then realize there is no way around all the water and begin to just run through it. I think to myself, "This is going to be a long day with all this water..."

As we run down the streets of Camp Al Asad, Iraq, the rain intensifies and the water is out of control, seeming to come from every direction. Flash flooding starts. At every street intersection, I am in water that is at least ankle deep and sometimes knee deep. My socks fill with sand and sediment as I run through the rivers of water, and again I find myself thinking, "How will I finish this race with all this sand and debris in my socks and shoes"?

At just over two miles into the race I am running down a divided street where the street next to me doesn't exist. It's a river! The passenger buses trying to drive down this street are stalling out and becoming stranded. At times I try to run on the dirt next to the street, but what appeared to be dirt is soggy clay. It's better just to run in the water. I spend the next 4 miles getting myself in a frame of mind to just finish. I throw out my goal time of 3.5 hours and think, "JUST FINISH!"

What comes next is completely crazy and something I will never forget! At mile 5.5, I come to a flooded intersection that turns and takes the runners to high ground. As I do at every other intersection, I slow down and high step my way through the water. But as I get closer to the corner I begin to walk because the water is too deep to run any further. As I round the corner there's a gauntlet of Marines and Volunteers waiting to help us. The water is waist deep and the current is strong enough to wash you off your feet. The lines of Marines are there to catch us if we fall, so we don't end up downstream of a flash flood! After I clear the gauntlet,

the water is thigh deep; there are tree branches, rocks, and other debris that bang into my shins (painful). The water is cold, and it takes two or three minutes to negotiate this 200-yard section of the course! This is extreme, to say the least, and right up my alley!

After leaving the water obstacle I slow down to let my muscles stretch back out and to allow my body to come back to normal temperature. For a while I think I am going to be a hypothermia casualty, but that ends up not being the case. I complete miles 6, 7, and 8 with no problem overcoming whatever comes my way, and then we get the word that the race has been cancelled and every one is to return to the start/finish line for accountability. I can't believe after all I have been through to this point that I won't have the opportunity to finish! I am upset to say the least!



The race was cancelled after 9.2 miles due to flash flooding and other safety concerns. I didn't finish the Marathon... officially!

I stood in the rain at the start/finish line: frustrated, mad, and disappointed. I couldn't believe that after all I had put into this I wouldn't get the opportunity to finish. I thought to myself, "There is no way I am not going to finish what I have started," so after a 25 minute intermission to turn in my race number and change my sand-filled socks, I step off on my own to FINISH what I started.

I proceed to run the remaining 17 miles of the marathon. The rain continued to fall the entire time I was running.

Miles 10 through 17 go well. I still have a good amount of adrenaline. However, at mile 18 it starts to go downhill. No one is around to motivate me, and I struggle to find the drive I need. Pain is setting in and the weather still sucks. As I push through miles 19 to 22, the pain in my hips and quads increases with every step. This is where I hit the "wall" everyone talks about. I walk for the first time at mile 22! I think about throwing in the towel and calling it a day. The pain is intense, and cramping sets in as soon as I quit running. But then I think about our Fallen Warriors, all the people that have supported me in raising money for the TAPS organization, and what the organization stands for. The pain in my legs was nowhere near the pain of losing a loved one! I found the motivation I needed, and thirty seconds later I am on the move again, putting one foot in front of the other! IT HURT!

Over the next 4.2 miles, I walked seven more times for 30 seconds each time, reflecting on why I was out there in the rain, punishing myself. Although the marathon was canceled, I had a reason (Fallen warriors and TAPS) and that is why I was there and was going to finish! I finished my 26.2 mile run in 3 hours 47 minutes and 44 seconds! I was one of four who finished the cancelled marathon. This was in remembrance of not one, but ALL fallen Service Members of the Armed Forces, and to provide assistance for those left behind.

In closing, I hope the amount of PAIN I felt on October 26th is equivalent to the help TAPS provides for the families of fallen Service Members. Thanks for your support and look for me next year, same time, hopefully different place, supporting a GREAT cause! ★

★ My Destiny ★

A Journey from Arlington to Arlington

By Xiomara Hall



I used to think life was an adventure. I had lived through so much in my few years... I experienced loss early in my life when my mother passed, but I still believed it was the natural order of things: children bury their parents. As I reflect on that period I understand now that it was part of a master plan, one that I did not understand, one I could not control, one that would carry me through today and the rest of my life.

It was March 29th 2008, a bright sunny day in southern California. I had returned home from doing Saturday errands when I got the call that my husband had been seriously injured when an IED struck his vehicle in Iraq. As my world began to collapse, as I gasped for breath, I called on a friend I knew could help me navigate as I sailed astray into fear and uncertainty. Needless to say the friend was a fellow Marine, Derrick Jones. Nevertheless, the wait seemed endless.

The next morning I knew I must prepare for the worst news of my life. As I sat in my living room awaiting "the visit" I was confused. This was not the

natural order of things. This father would not leave his children, this husband would not leave his wife, this son would not leave his mother, this man would not leave his family. As the Marines approached the door, my first instinct was to slam it shut and never let them in, for then it would not be true.

My heart sank as I looked at my children: Xavier, Xander, Tia, and Gladys. Without words, they knew our lives would never be the same. My 3-year-old Gladys, not understanding why, but knowing something had gone horribly wrong, began to cry with us. I felt my friend Leticia's soft hand on my back and the slight sound of her lament. I looked at Derrick for answers and knew he had none to give. I heard the distant voice of a Marine casualty officer "Mrs. Hall we regret to inform you..." Once again the master plan was not mine to command.

As our family prepared for the arrival of my husband's remains, the tributes to his life, and his final resting, we questioned everything: his career, his injuries, and ultimately our faith. I thought, "How did I get to this place? I had simply married a good man who looked absolutely stunning in dress blues. How did I become the statistic? This happens to other families, not ours. I don't belong here."

Some days I comprehended and accepted the loss, other days I still hoped for that call that he was in fact okay, and that it was all a big mistake, or that I would wake up from this nightmare and find him lying beside me taking up more than his half of our bed.

Seven weeks passed, and I traveled to Virginia to TAPS National Survivors Seminar and Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors. I was trying to do anything I could to help my children. I knew I had made a good decision, but as I left them with their mentors on that first day I sobbed because I thought I was a bad mother. What kind of mother has to bring her children to such a camp?

I attended a seminar on How to have a Good Bad Day, led by Darcie Sims. This woman seemed to know everything about me although we had never met. She tapped into the very grief I had tried so hard to contain. I thought I was keeping my composure until she asked a question of the audience "... and in the end what do we all want?" In my mind I had the only right answer in the room, but then as if my very thoughts had been written on the wall, the entire room replied in unison "to have them back again." I could no longer hold it back. With no air in my lungs, no strength in my body, no shame in my pain, I bent over and allowed myself to cry.



Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted



During the weekend, we were invited to speak aloud our loved one's name, rank and relationship during a memorial ceremony. With the support of my newfound friends and family in grief, I walked to the podium and held my crystal teardrop; a symbol of the many tears shed since we'd lost our loved ones. Fully prepared to say what was suggested, I opened my mouth but had lost my voice. The simple lines I rehearsed while standing in line were somewhere lost in that crowd. A mixture of grief, pride, pain, and hope filled the room. I again tried to speak the simple sentences, but nothing came out. I looked over at Juan, the father of an Army soldier, I looked down at the podium where a poem was written but had not yet been read, I searched deep in my soul, and the words finally came out "Seven weeks ago I lost my best friend, father to our four children: Lt. Col. William G. Hall, USMC, OORAH!"

At the Saturday night banquet for the adults, I understood and felt the true meaning of the empty seat in the front of the room. The Missing Man Table was a place setting I had seen at many a Marine Corps ball, but never truly appreciated. The sound of TAPS being played devoured my fragile composure. I heard a mother painfully tell a counselor "I shouldn't be here," and knew exactly what she meant, her words carving themselves into my heart as if I had known and loved her son myself. That weekend at TAPS changed my life.

As I look at photos I see those changes. The sorrow my soul carries because I felt so abandoned was now visible in every feature. My face lacks the color it once had. My eyes, barely visible from the constant crying, are heavy from sleepless nights. The smile I use to face the world lacks the enthusiasm of knowing I had it all. My posture is dispirited knowing I have been defeated by something greater than me.



In the midst of my grief my friend Leticia, an avid runner, suggested we run the Marine Corps Marathon together. She knew me well enough to know I needed a goal if I was to survive this leg of my journey. During the training for the Marine Corps Marathon I often questioned my sanity. Why would I put myself through this, knowing the introspective sojourn I still needed to endure? As I ticked away at my training miles, my thoughts went often to my husband: his laughter, his dedication to the Marine Corps, his love for our family, his tears for his Marines, his devotion to his mother, his adventures.

While I train, I remember the gathering at our home before the deployment when I met the spouses and families of Will's fellow team members. I remember the father of one young Marine who had told Will "I'm only loaning him to you, I want him back!" and how the weight of that statement carried so heavily on his heart that night. I remember the endless calls I made to family and friends, how often the silence on the other end was deafening. I remember hearing men sob uncontrollably. I remember the service held at Camp Pendleton in which I tried to comfort total strangers and wives for whom I was their worst nightmare. I remember gathering with the team upon their return from Iraq, using humor to disguise my horrible envy of these wives because they had their husbands back and I didn't.



With every step in training I gained more clarity. I cried, I laughed, and I sang at the top of my lungs accompanied by my iPod, even when I had no breath left in me at mile 18.

My journey has brought me here once again, to Arlington: the place where Will lies with our nation's heroes and presidents, the place where I said my final goodbye, the place which will forever hold a part of who I am. I stand here challenging my body to endure 26.2 miles, yet with every step and mile my heart has traveled infinitely further. *

**God Bless America,
our destinies, and you.**

Xiomara is the surviving wife of Lt. Col. William G. Hall who died March 30, 2008, from wounds he suffered while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar province, Iraq.



Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called sons of God

From Attitude to Gratitude

By Betsy Beard



Mom of SPC Bradley S. Beard, who was killed in Ar Ramadi, Iraq on October 14, 2004

Weak sunlight filtering through the falling leaves, a cold mist rising from the river, and frost on the ground. It's November, again. We're supposed to be thankful...

I am transported back in time to the first year following our son's death in Iraq. The season pressed in on me and I flinched away from it in anger and hurt. The holidays loomed large and bleak without Brad, and as the waves of despair and resentment washed over me, I was anything but grateful. I even wrote a prayer/poem about my condition, titled, simply:



Thanksgiving 2005

By Elisabeth Beard

Why would I thank You?

My only son lies dead.

How much would it mean to You

Even if I said,

"Father, in heaven,

From whom all blessings flow,"

For even if I speak the words,

You are God. You'd know...

You see my stricken heart.

You hear my pain wrenched cries.

You would know the pretty words

Are total, baldfaced lies.

What shall I say then,

God of all compassion?

Only that I love You still

In faltering, grief-drained fashion.

In the intervening years between that time and now, somewhere along the road, somehow against my wishes, I began to see in a very small way that there were unexplained circumstances for which I could be slightly thankful... events that showed me that people cared, that God had not abandoned our family, that grace was still operating in the world, and that the hearts of others could still knit with ours, forming friendships that have been forged in the inferno of our grief.

With that realization, the first positive emotion that I had experienced in a very long time broke through my frozen defenses. It felt so new and so strange to me that I had to stop and figure out what it was. Over time, I came to recognize it as gratitude. I wasn't terribly willing to acknowledge these new feelings. They seemed disloyal to Brad, to our family, and to Brad's memory. It seemed so wrong to start a sentence, with "I am grateful," or "We have been fortunate that..." But there was no way around it. Although they seemed to defy the awful circumstances, those sentences were beginning to pile up.



Through the tears, I first discovered that I was grateful to have been associated with the magnificent human being that was SPC Brad Beard. Even though the pain of loss was unbearable, it would have been worse never to have known him. On the heels of that revelation came gratitude for the amazing men and women of the United States armed forces. I am astounded that there are still men and women who are willing and able to put their lives on the line to protect the freedoms that we have come to take for granted.

Next, I became aware of the special people who had entered my life after Brad departed. People who willingly spent time with me in my shriveled, lifeless condition. People who went out of their way to let us know they appreciated Brad's sacrifice on their own behalf and on behalf of their children. Strangers all across America who wanted to reach out and comfort us. *[NOTE: Some of these people and organizations can be found in this issue, in the article about memorial gifts to families of the fallen.]* My own TAPS Peer Mentor had told me that grief has a way of changing your address book. I mourned the loss of old friends who were unable to stick around. But I slowly realized that others had taken their places, standing alongside of us and propping us up with their strength.

Still today, when I think about the people I have come to know because of the

tragedy of Brad's death, my dominant frame of mind is a sense of gratitude. My TAPS family is a large part of that focus. Some have brought comfort. Some have made me smile. Others have cried with me, or simply allowed me to cry in their presence, without judgment or condescension. Some have listened



to my angry rants. Others have prayed for me, sent cards, called, exchanged emails, shared stories of their heroes, and allowed me to share mine. Most never even knew Brad. And yet we are a family, and I am grateful.

Some of my new friends have been around for all four years of our loss, interrupting their own journeys to help us. They could have turned aside, as others have done. But they didn't, and

I am grateful. Their actions have helped me to remember that there is a God who cares. And even though He won't come down here and fix the problem, or answer my agonized questions, He is (at the very least) still dispatching emergency personnel to tend to my unseen, but grievous, wounds.

Some of you who are reading this publication are facing your own losses for the first time this season. Some have been on this journey for a long, long time. Regardless of the time frame, our lives have now intersected at that horrible point in time in which our loved ones were killed. We never wanted to be a part of the TAPS family. We had no choice in the circumstances that have taken our loved ones. But we do have a choice in opening our hearts to each other as we face the difficulties of the holiday season together.

Your TAPS family invites you to join us. We are here for you. We won't all be gathering around a food-laden table complete with turkey and trimmings. We couldn't possibly fit in one room. But if you are able to sit down to some sort of meal this Thanksgiving, please know that our hearts are with you, and that we are grateful for the courage and sacrifice of the one you loved so well. ☆

If you find that you need a listening ear during this especially difficult time, call us 24 hours a day at 800-959-TAPS (8277).



Letter to My Love

By Michelle West

Read to family and friends at the funeral of Laurent J. West who was killed near Kishkishkia, Iraq on March 11, 2008

My Dearest Laurent,

Our relationship has always involved the written word. From getting to know one another through e-mails, to leaving love notes around the house and then having the opportunity to instant message when we were countries apart. Through all this, our marriage grew into a love that few people are ever blessed enough to experience. How was I to know that the last time I would ever feel your strong arms around me would be June 8, 2007. As I look at all the pictures of our six years and two months together, I can see how we have grown as people and as husband and wife. The bond we share gives me the strength I need to stand here today, instead of crawling into that deep dark hole that would make all the pain go away. But then I realize that you fell in love with me because of my strength and that I'll need every ounce of it to get through this. It is only with the love and support of our family and friends, The Big Guy In The Sky, and most of all the feeling of you holding me up and reminding me not to give in, that I find a way to carry on.

If you were up here speaking today, you would remind everyone that you gave your life for a cause that you believed in. You told me as we were sitting on our front porch one evening that if anything happened, I was not to be angry or bitter or question why. You said that if God decided it was your time, you would have been proud to have died for a country we both love, and that keeping your loved ones safe back home would have made the sacrifice worth it to you.

Do I understand why the only man who ever truly loved me and who would never leave me, was taken far too early? No, but you do and one day when we are finally together again, I will too. I need you to help guide me, so that I am able to continue on the path that I must now take alone. We dreamed of growing old together, laughing and enjoying life. I wrote you a few months ago telling you that even though our life would not be perfect, I had the perfect partner to share the rest of my life with. As I realize you will never walk through our front door again, I see all the signs that you are spiritually with me. You are telling me that even though you are not here physically, your presence is now in a form that is much stronger and you will continue to love and protect me. Thank you for showing me what love is supposed to be, and for giving our girls an example of what they should look for in a husband.

You would want everyone here today not to weep for your death but to learn from your life. To learn to love people for who they are and not what we think they should be. To embrace the passion of learning. To be able to laugh at one's self and at others. To work smarter not harder. To realize that there are situations where rules can be bent and that sometimes it's easier to ask for forgiveness than

for permission. You would want us to follow our dreams because life is short and we must make every day count. Most important, to stand tall because we live in America, the greatest country in the world.

I will close this letter by asking God to bless this country you loved and to give strength to all those who have been lucky enough to know you. Thank you, my sweet sexy husband for loving me even when I didn't like myself. This is a gift I will cherish the rest of my life. As the last letter I will ever write you Laurent, I want you to know that there is a piece of my heart that died with you but I will try to continue to be the woman you would want me to be.

Love,
Michelle J. West, AKA The Proud Wife Of An American Hero



SNOWFLAKES

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

Have you ever stood outside, with your head tilted back and your mouth open wide, trying to catch a snowflake? Snowflakes fall everywhere, on your hair, your chin, your eyelashes, even your nose. And some even manage to land on the very tip of your tongue, only to vanish before you can really get a taste.

Each snowflake is a completely different design and pattern. No two are ever created exactly the same. It is a mystery that continues to delight snow catchers everywhere. There are very few things that can be so lovely, so delicate, so perfect, so different... and disappear so quickly, never to be reproduced in exactly the same pattern again.

Sometimes it seems as though people are like that, too. Those we love are so lovely, so delicate, so perfect, so different; and they disappeared too quickly, too.

Each of us is as unique as those childhood snowflakes. We each have a unique look, sound, smell, touch. We are cut from unique patterns, assembled in an endless variety of shapes, styles, and combinations. We look, sound, talk, think and act differently than anyone else. There are no identical matches, just as there are no perfectly identical snowflakes.

We know this, but when it comes to grieving, we demand that everyone grieve the same way. Some of us will talk our way through the iciness of our grief while others prefer more solitude. Some want to read everything they can about grief while others wish to submerge themselves in work. Some cry endlessly while others never shed tears. We are as unique as snowflakes drifting from the sky.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, although there are some ways that are a bit less dramatic. Just as the snowflakes find their way to their destination, so too, will each of us find our own way through grief. Frozen hearts and numb minds do, eventually, thaw. Icy memories that chill to the bone can grow warmer as we begin to move through our grief.

Sometimes, especially in the early months and even years of grief, all we can remember is the pain and horrible-ness of our loved one's death. Pain seems to overshadow everything. These shadows seem to make every day harder. And in winter, the shadows seem longer, deeper, darker. The snowflakes seem small, less beautiful. The magic of winter's decorations only leaves us cold and barren. If we begin as frozen beings, the journey through grief becomes a process of thawing. And each of us will defrost in a pattern as unique and individual as the snowflakes that drift across the windowpane, leaving little icy streaks of memory on the heart.

Be patient with yourself this winter season. Recognize your own unique emotions and hurts and learn to identify the tracings of your own snowflakes of grief. You will survive these winter days and this winter season. You will begin to defrost eventually and it will be far less painful if you will begin to cherish your differences rather than use them as weapons and yardsticks of judgment.

Whatever hurt we are carrying begins to weave itself into our very being and ultimately it becomes a part of our history. We become the sum total of all of our experiences. Our unique pattern begins to reflect our unique journey. We carry souvenirs of our hurts, each stored away until it is time to add them to the next hurt, thus piling up one hurt after another, all to be carried forever in our being. These hurts leave scars, some big, some small, but all significant in their pain. Each scar must have a place in our being. We become a carefully organized mass of layers, as delicate and intricate and individual as a snowflake.

SURVIVING THE WINTER SEASON

WAYS TO THAW, SURVIVE AND FIND HOPE

BRUSH YOUR TEETH, every morning. No matter what else happens, do that and you are on your way. Just keeping a routine is a way to counteract the craziness. It is a responsible “adult” thing to do and is a start. Just do it. Your dentist, your mother, and everyone you encounter will be glad you did.

❄️ **TAKE OUT THE TRASH.** Just get it out of the house. Someday you can try getting it out on the right day.

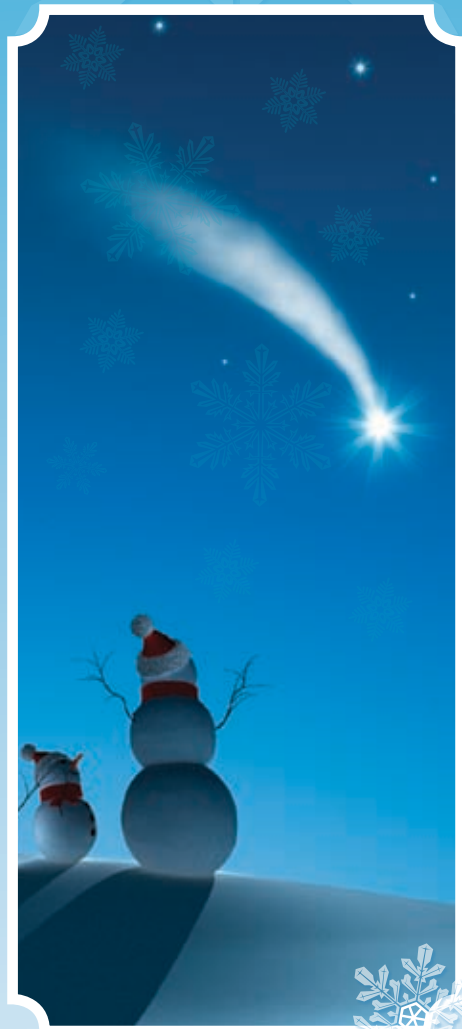
❄️ **BE REALISTIC.** It will hurt, but don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Let those hurting moments come, deal with them, and let them go.

❄️ **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). If nothing else, jog your memory.

❄️ **WORK AT LIFTING DEPRESSION.** Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat occasionally.

❄️ **BUY A GIFT.** Buy a gift for yourself. Wrap it, but don't hide it! Just when you think you are going “off the deep end,” open it up and enjoy. While you are buying a gift for yourself, buy one for your loved one as well. Wrap it up and give it away to someone who might not otherwise have a gift. Pass on the love you shared together and it can never die.

❄️ **BREATHE.** In and out. In and out. It's that simple and that hard. Some days just breathing is all you can manage. Other days it's a bit easier so relax and enjoy those moments when you can remember your loved one's life instead of focusing only on the death.



❄️ **HANG THE STOCKINGS; PLACE A WREATH ON THE GRAVE.** Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

❄️ **GET OUTSIDE.** Catch snowflakes. Make a snow angel. Build a sand castle. Take a memory walk.

❄️ **PUT SOMETHING IN YOUR POCKET** that reminds you of your loved one and every time you need a hug, just pat your pocket and recall the loving connection between you. I carry a rock with me always, to remind me of the steadiness, security, and sturdiness of his love. I've carved the word HOPE on that rock so I won't forget what hope is all about. Hope isn't a place or a thing. Hope isn't the absence of pain or sadness or sorrow. Hope is possibility. Hope is the memory of love given and received.

Surviving really isn't too hard. Living can be. No matter how crazy the world or out of “sync” you feel, don't lose the treasure of your loved one's presence in your life. You don't have to say goodbye. You don't stop loving someone just because he died.

Claim your grief and your unique way of surviving. Do whatever it takes to remember the life of your loved one, not just the death.

Each footprint is unique, each hurt is different, each snowflake the only one ever created. Your love is real, just as is your pain. But leave the regrets behind in the slush. Bring the joy of loving with you into this holiday season. Let its memory light your world. Our loved ones died, but we did not lose them.

Time and space become meaningless for us. The bonds between us are too strong to let death sever the ties. So light a candle and whisper a THANK YOU for the moments you traveled together. Our arms may be empty, but the heart is full. And every time you see a snowflake or just imagine one, remember to cherish its unique design and pattern... and to cherish your unique footprint through grief. ❄️

Dear Friends,

*Light a candle this holiday,
a candle in celebration of a life
well lived and loved. Remember
the joy that used to light your life
and let it glow within you,
this holiday season and always.*

*Your T★A★P★S
Family sends a
warm embrace
of love and comfort
to you this holiday
season and always.*





TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

National Military Survivor Seminar

Memorial Day Weekend 2009

Memorial Day... a time of remembrance for the nation to honor those who have served and died... a difficult “holiday” for military survivors. Please join us in the nation’s capital as we bring together survivors from across the country and leading professionals in the grief and trauma field, to share a weekend of understanding, hope, courage, and love. An atmosphere of care and support await you in a safe and supportive environment. This weekend is for you and your family. Meet other survivors, share your journey, and honor your loved ones.





TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

National Military Survivor Seminar

Memorial Day Weekend 2009

TAPS is proud to sponsor air travel for those participants who need assistance in attending the 2009 TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp! For more information, please visit www.taps.org today. Space is limited and available on a first come, first booked basis. Please register today!

Logistics

For anyone faced with the traumatic loss of someone who served in the military, TAPS provides a supportive atmosphere that offers comfort and nurtures healing. At the seminar, you can connect with others in similar situations, learn coping strategies to help, and hear how others find the strength to live again.

★ All events and workshops take place in the world-class Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center. The Gaylord National covers 41.7 acres along the banks of the Potomac River in Prince George's County, Maryland just south of Washington, DC.

★ The Gaylord National boasts four restaurants, two lounges, and a coffee bar, in addition to a spa, fitness room, and pool. Amenities include TV, high-speed Internet access, in-room safe, two telephones, refrigerator, AM/FM/CD clock radio, and coffee maker.

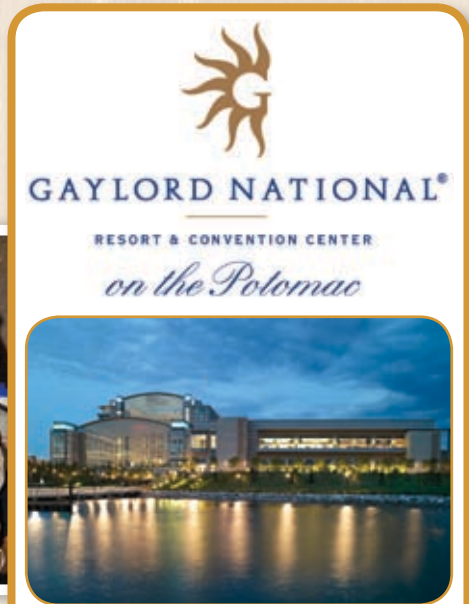
★ Gaylord National is a 15-minute drive from Reagan National Airport and within a 45-minute drive from Dulles and Baltimore Washington International Airports.

★ The seminar registration fee of \$185 includes seven meals, workshop materials, ground transportation to all special events, and a TAPS t-shirt. The registration fee of \$50.00 for each child attending the Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors covers meals, transportation, two Good Grief Camp t-shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.

★ Scholarships are available if you are facing financial challenges. Please call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS for more info.

★ To make your reservation, sign up as soon as possible by visiting www.taps.org and clicking on "Gaylord National" to get our special conference rate of \$139 per day (If you have any problems or you find the room block is full, call us at 800-959-TAPS)

★ Events start with registration on Friday morning, so you should plan to arrive either on Thursday or early on Friday.



*Friendship is born at that moment
when one person says to another:
"What! You, too? Thought I was the only one."
- C.S. Lewis*



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

National Military Survivor Seminar

Memorial Day Weekend 2009

Events

If you have been affected by the death of someone in the military, whether it was a family member, friend, or fellow service member, you are warmly invited and encouraged to attend. Our seminar is also essential for all those who work directly with military survivors and who desire the very best information on military survivor issues from America's leading grief and trauma experts.

Workshops for Survivors

TAPS provides workshops that are designed to help you heal and cope with life after a loss. Our carefully chosen topics include understanding complicated grief in the military, coping with new family dynamics, special issues facing children, parents, and significant others when a death occurs, and recognizing post traumatic stress. We will also have gentle, supportive discussions offering a chance to share with others who are facing similar experiences.

Good Grief Camp for Youth

TAPS Good Grief Camp is the nation's only event that connects military children of all ages who have lost someone they love in the Armed Forces. At camp, the children learn coping skills, and develop their own peer network among new friends: kids who understand because they are facing a similar loss. The Good Grief Camp is full of fun and hard work. For children who are experiencing difficulty in dealing with the death of a parent, sibling, or other loved one, this is a wonderful time for them to begin to heal.

Special Events

The Seminar will take place near Washington, DC and we will be attending the special ceremonies at the Marine Barracks, the U.S. Capitol, and Arlington National Cemetery. There is also plenty of free time for relaxing and visiting with your newfound friends. Just let us know how we can make your weekend better!

Workshops for the Professional

If you work directly with military survivors, TAPS offers cutting edge professional training and workshops with the best grief and trauma specialists in the U.S. This is the only training opportunity of its kind in America for chaplains, casualty and mortuary staffs, family support groups, commanders and their spouses, military mental health personnel, medical staffs, and therapists.

Peer Mentor Training

For those who are at least one year beyond their own loss, and are ready to be there for others and offer support, we have a day of training on the Thursday prior to the Seminar. You will learn more about grief and trauma, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team!

TAPS Seminar Offers Survivors Comfort and Support

"When Maria, the love of my life was killed in Iraq, I was alone. I had no direction, no ambition, no new memories and no life. Life stood still and nothing mattered anymore. I learned about TAPS through a fellow widower. I registered, attended my first seminar and was embraced and welcomed into a family of friends. I found a family of caring people who understood my pain and loss. I found people who would not allow me to walk the path of grief alone. Through TAPS, I've met many families who have lost a love one as I have. These families have accepted me as a friend who they can relate to in their time of grief. We have shared memories of pain and laughter in our loved one's honor. These memories would have stayed hidden if not for TAPS embracing me and others like me into a family of friends. At present, I receive or make a call to someone that I have met at TAPS on a daily basis. TAPS reached out to me with compassion and love in my time of need. Thank you for embracing me and allowing to be part of that family. Maria's spirit, love and memories live on through me. I'M NOT ALONE ANYMORE!!!"

HBO Honors Surviving Families

By Ami Neiberger-Miller

HBO's new one-hour documentary film, *Section 60: Arlington National Cemetery*, offers viewers an intimate look at the families who frequent our nation's most well-known cemetery to remember, mourn, and honor lives lost to war.

More than 500 service members who have given their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan are buried at Arlington National Cemetery. The film explores the community of surviving families that has emerged at what has been called "the saddest acre in America."

It's a place where wind chimes call from the trees, children leave pictures and notes for daddies, flowers bloom year-round from vases tended by mothers, and lipstick kisses on headstones attest to enduring love and heartache. In the film, viewers meet a young widow whose daughter is learning to walk at her father's grave and see a group of mothers sitting side-by-side comforting each other as they talk about their Marine and Army sons. They also watch a father keep vigil over his Marine son's grave and comfort a battle-scarred buddy, and hear a brother-in-law talk about sharing a beer with the grave of a 22-year-old soldier.

"The film shows companionship in action with people walking alongside each other as they live through their grief," said Ami Neiberger-Miller, public affairs officer for TAPS and a participant in the project. "It is a sad film, but it also shows the power of the human spirit to reach out and help another, even in the midst of pain."

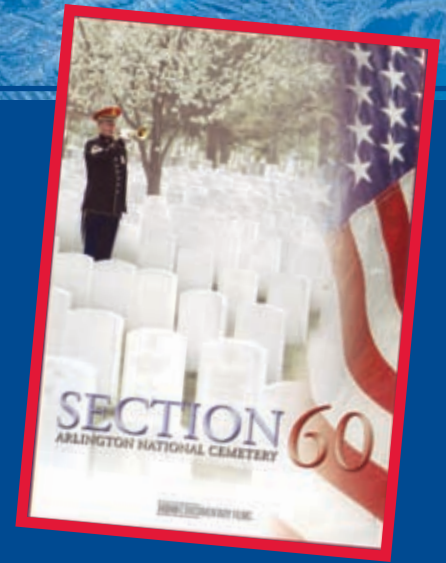
The idea for the film began through a friendship formed between HBO staff and the surviving family of US Marine Lance Corporal Robert Mininger during

work on Baghdad ER. Mininger died in the film, and the HBO staff reached out to his family before airing the film. HBO's Sheila Nevins called Paula Zwillinger, Robert's mother, on the anniversary of his death to ask how she was doing, and was surprised to hear that she was at section 60 with her son. During the conversation, Nevins learned more about this unique place and community.

Filmmakers Jon Alpert and Matthew O'Neill with co-producer Rebecca Abrahams, spent four months at the cemetery. They gently approached families with their cameras off, explained the project to them, and became part of the community of families there at the graves. The result is a poignant and emotional film that honors surviving families and the loved ones they've lost. "We learned a great deal about love at Arlington. I knew I would learn about loss, but I learned what the phrase 'Love Never Dies' truly means," said O'Neill.

Many images in the film resonate with, and stir the emotions of, surviving families, who see their own experiences and feelings mirrored. "The film is a story about people at various stages of grief who are opening their hearts and souls. It shows the struggles these people are going through," said Zwillinger. "The thing about Section 60 is that everyone there has a bond. And the bond is their grief. So no matter what state that they are in, and no matter what their opinions are on the war, or what their gender or race is, that's all put aside. We all bond together, the other families, whether they're moms or brothers or sisters or wives."

The same desire to be with other surviving families that brings families to TAPS events, is also part of what draws them to section 60. "It's a gathering



of families that have been through the exact same pain and emotional heart-break. There's only one way to get the help, and that's to really talk to somebody who really feels that pain," said Zwillinger.

TAPS hosted an advance screening of the film for surviving families in the Washington, DC area a day before the film's national premiere on HBO. Following the screening, the filmmakers answered questions from the audience. The first person to rise to speak was Khizr Khan, father of US Army Captain Humayun Khan, who was killed in Iraq in 2004 and is buried at section 60. Khan eloquently thanked the filmmakers for their work and commitment to creating a film that honored the sacrifices of so many.

This is the third HBO film in a trilogy of war-related documentaries. Alpert and O'Neill also created the Emmy-winning Baghdad ER and Emmy-nominated *Alive Day Memories: Home from Iraq*. The film is currently running on HBO and is available for purchase on DVD through hbo.com and amazon.com. More information about the film is available through HBO's website at hbo.com under documentary films. *

Christmas in Section 60

Arlington National Cemetery

By Scott Warner

Photos By Scott Warner & Christopher Levy

Christmas is a special time for families. My family has always loved Christmas, and it is a wonderful time of year for making memories with your special loved ones, family, and friends. Over the years, our family developed our own special traditions and rituals that became part of our holiday season. Each year, we spent Christmas Eve at my cousin's house, wore special Christmas pajamas, and hung a new Christmas ornament on the tree for our three boys to add to their collections. Your family most likely has its own special traditions as well.

Our First Holiday

Heath, our oldest son, loved Christmas. He would get so excited on Christmas Eve that he couldn't sleep. Meanwhile, I wanted to get the gifts under the tree, and I could not play Santa until he went to sleep. Those ended up being late nights and I was exhausted on Christmas Day... It is strange looking back on those memories now.

Christmas 2006 was going to be Heath's first Christmas away from his family, as he was to be in Iraq. We had prepared and shipped his special boxes filled with treats and gifts, a miniature Christmas tree with all our pictures on it, and a Christmas stocking containing special messages in glitter on the front. Many of our friends and family had sent packages, too. How were we to know that he would never celebrate Christmas with us again in this world?

Heath was killed in action on November 22, 2006 in the Anbar Province of Iraq, and was buried in Arlington

National Cemetery on December 13, 2006. I remember looking across the cemetery as I sat before Heath's casket and seeing Christmas wreaths and decorations around the headstones. It was a painful reminder that he would not be with us this Holiday Season.

Once we returned home, we began to prepare for Christmas Day. The rituals that I once looked forward to became a source for magnifying our loss. Yet, we wanted to make the holidays special for our remaining sons, Chandler and Ashton. We tried our best to maintain some of our special traditions, but it was hard work. I could not put up a tree, shop, or bake cookies; our friends and family did that for us. We did go to my cousin's; we wore Christmas pajamas and even placed new ornaments on the tree on Christmas Eve.

I thought I had made it through the holiday, but the reality of his death hit hard when two days after Christmas, the doorbell rang and I looked out to see a stack of boxes on our front porch. They were all Heath's Christmas packages returned to us from Iraq. It was an emotionally devastating sight and I was painfully aware there were no presents for Heath this Christmas except for a simple evergreen branch attached to a temporary marker at his fresh grave in Section 60. We left the next day for Disney World to escape the heartache of the remaining season.

The Second Year

Last year, as we approached our second Christmas season without Heath, we made plans to go to his grave on the Saturday that Wreaths



© Scott Warner

Across America came to Arlington to decorate the graves. Melissa and I decided we could not move forward with the holiday season until we had spent time with Heath at his grave.

We purchased special holiday decorations; a wreath for Heath's grave and some extra wreaths in case some of the other graves needed to be decorated. We also brought Christmas ornaments to hang on the bushes and trees near his grave. We had heard that people would decorate the trees near their loved ones' graves, and so each of us had a special ornament to remember Heath. We had purchased ornaments with a blank section for writing a message. They were not fancy but we thought they could last outdoors through the winter weather... at least until Christmas day.

When we arrived at Section 60 of Arlington National Cemetery, the stark white gravestones had been transformed into a Christmas celebration for all our heroes. Simple evergreen wreaths with crisp red bows could be seen throughout the cemetery as families and friends expressed their respect, love, and devotion, by decorating the graves. Much to our surprise, a

wreath had already been placed on Heath's grave. Our time there was not an intimate moment with our son, but we arranged our wreath and other decorations, placing them just so. We also spent time decorating the graves without wreaths, and visiting with other families who had come to their loved ones' graves.

The Barbieri family brought a heart shaped wreath with family pictures tied to it, and they decorated and spent time "with" their hero, TJ, a much missed and much loved son and brother. Toasts were made and cigars smoked in his memory. Each year Nicholas Kirven's family brings a wreath given to them by another surviving family, the Philippons. The wreath has four candles representing Hope, Grief, Memories, and Love. They light each candle as they read the words that describe its symbolism. Then joining hands, and inviting anyone present to participate, they pray the Lord's Prayer. The family of Cpl. Stephen Bixler has for the past three years packed up and headed to Arlington for Christmas. The hotel where they stay makes grilled cheese and fries to go, which they take to Section 60 for their holiday dinner with Steven. Julie Jutras, mother of PFC Dillon Jutras usually brings the kids and grandkids, and decorates a small Christmas tree with photos of family and friends, flags, ribbon, quotes, and messages. At the end of the season they take it home, clean it up, and update it for the next year.

Holly, a well-known figure to the families of Section 60, is the bringer of the tree skirt for the holly tree near the York side of Section 60. Although she cannot place the skirt until after the last funeral on December 24th, the families know it will be arriving soon. As one of the "guardian angels" who visits with and supports the grieving families of Section 60, Holly trims the pentagonal tree skirt with the roses that were placed in Arlington the previous February. New traditions started by other Section 60 families have also sprung up from the hallowed

groundofArlington...groundthatalso brought forth the worst pain that these families have ever known. It was quite a sight to see all the decorated graves and all the people in Section 60 on that December day.

New Traditions

Before we left to return home, we hung our ornaments on one of the holly bushes near Heath's grave. Ashton's ornament was a cute little Santa Claus that simply stated, "I Love Heath." It captured the heart of how we all felt. As we stood there, I remember looking at the other ornaments honoring the lives of the other loved ones buried in Section 60, and I turned to Melissa and said, "Who would have thought our newest Christmas tradition would be coming to Arlington to place a wreath and an ornament at our son's grave?"

It was comforting to realize that we were still including Heath in one of our special traditions... one that we had maintained since he was a little boy. Now we would hang a new ornament on the tree and visit with our new family of friends from Arlington Section 60. In reality, we were creating new traditions from our old ones. I cannot imagine going through the Holiday Season without spending time with Heath.

In the end, it is still about making memories and special times with our loved ones, and I know we will always celebrate Christmas with all of our sons, Heath, Chandler, and Ashton. It is a different kind of celebration now, but we will remember all the love, all the good times, and all the Christmases of the past as we look forward to the day when we will celebrate together once again. ★

*From our Family to Yours,
We wish you a Wonderful,
Blessed Holiday Season*

*Scott, Melissa, Chandler, and Ashton
Warner, Surviving Family of PVT Heath
D. Warner, www.pvttheathwarner.com*



© Scott Warner



© Christopher Levy



© Barbieri Family



Handling the Holidays When Grief is a Visitor

By Father Charles Hudson

We all know what grief is when we mourn the death of a child. The pain of loss almost threatens our sanity, our desire to embrace life itself. As we look around and begin to witness the sights, smells, and sounds of the holiday season, we feel a tug at the heart and begin to ask ourselves "How am I going to get through these days ahead?"

Author and grief lecturer, Rabbi Earl Grollman once commented at a workshop I attended that "Grief is a process—

recovery is a decision." In the classic book *A Grief Observed*, author C.S. Lewis echoed the truth of that statement when he wrote, "I was shocked that I did not die from grief. And I know now that I will not die from grief because I choose not to. I may run—or shake wildly—or lie paralyzed on the ground for awhile—but I will not ultimately succumb. Whatever gives us an increased sense of control—whether it be love or faith or cognitive coping seems to mobilize our self healing systems."

For most of us, we know we will not die as a result of our grief. So we must decide to live—to find the strength to go on despite what we have lost. This requires a decision on our part to do something to help ourselves move through the pain. The holidays increase the pain because they validate the absence and the death of our siblings or children and challenge us to make some basic decisions on just how we will get through the next few weeks.



I would like to make a few suggestions for you to ponder and decide upon as the holidays descend on us.

★ Decide just how much holiday you can or want to handle. You can eliminate or modify all or some of your past holiday traditions—e.g. holiday cards, decorations, etc. Shopping need not be done if you lack the energy. If you feel the need to give a gift, then try cash or a gift certificate.

★ Eliminate unnecessary stress. You need some special time for self. Avoid people who will add stress. Some have referred to this kind of people as “toxic” people. Ask yourself the question, “Who are the people I feel most safe with?”

★ Decide not to hide your grief. If the situation arises, then speak openly of your grief—mention the name of your sibling or child. Most around you will be avoiding the mention of your sibling’s name. So put his/her name in your conversation.

★ Many who are bereaved decide to do something very different on the first Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah—so different that the absence of the loved one won’t be so obvious. For example, try going to a completely different place.

★ Decide to plan ahead for family gatherings. Don’t let others plan for you. Do what is right for you! Focus on what you need and want to do. You do not have to go where everyone else thinks you should go.

★ Decide to embrace your memories—not avoid or deny them. Do not hold back the tears. Decide who you can reach out to if the feelings of anxiety and loneliness become too overwhelming. Don’t be fearful of acknowledging that you need someone to be there for you.

★ Express your faith. Only attend religious services if you feel they will help you to cope better with your feelings.

★ One of the last lines in the play *I Never Sang for My Father* is spoken by the son as he drives away from the funeral of his father—“Death ends a life, but never a relationship.” Your relationship with your sibling is still very much alive. For now it may cause you some pain, but in the end, it will be the source of your strength to survive.

★ Remember the words of the wise man who was once asked by his king to give him some words of wisdom that would cover all situations in life—both good or bad. The wise man responded, “This too will pass.” These next few weeks will also pass.

★ Remember the anticipation of the holiday is often harder than the actual day.

Let me share with you a beautiful story I recently came across.

A farmer had an old orange tree on his property which had been badly damaged during a brush fire. Practically all the leaves were burned off and in many places the flames had seared through the bark. The wounded tree had not borne fruit in several years anyway—so the farmer decided to finish it off. He used a tractor with a large scoop to try to push the tree down. Again and again he banged the tree with the scoop, opening up deep gashes in the trunk. But the old orange tree would not budge. Finally the farmer quit trying, went back to his regular farm chores and eventually forgot all about the orange tree.

The following spring, the farmer was amazed to discover that the tree he had given up on was producing some of the biggest, juiciest oranges he had ever seen. And for many years the tree continued to bear rich fruit. The farmer explained, “The orange tree’s recovery seemed like a miracle. Actually what had happened was part of a natural, ordinary process that had been retarded by the fire and then shocked back into action by my tractor scoop. When the scoop cut those gashes into the trunk, it forced the energizing sap to begin its natural journey out of the roots and up into the tree. And it just kept on going—right up through the entire tree, giving it new life.”

My prayer for all of you this holiday season will be for you to discover your roots and find in those roots the very sap that you will need to energize you and thereby give you the courage to make the decision to survive the days and months ahead. ★

Father Hudson was a twice-bereaved sibling and vice president and co-founder of the Center for Hope Hospice Program in Linden, New Jersey. He was also Supervisor of Counseling Services for Bereavement for the Center, and Spiritual and Educational Coordinator. A frequent speaker at local TCF chapters, he also lectured on topics dealing with Family Relationships; Adolescence; and Death and Dying—Process of Grief and Bereavement. Father Hudson died in 1997, within a few months of writing this story.

Reprinted from *We Need Not Walk Alone*, the national magazine of *The Compassionate Friends*. Copyright 1996

A New Look for the TAPS Website

TAPS is pleased to announce a new look to our website!

The TAPS family stretches across the country, and indeed across the globe. Connecting this community and bringing comfort, hope, and timely support is at the heart of the TAPS mission, and our website is a vital component of that mission.

Whether you are a survivor, caregiver, family support, volunteer, or friend, there is something for you on our site. The new look supports in-depth information and links to our Peer Mentor network, chat rooms and forums, local support groups, grief resources and publications, help for caregivers, and much more!

Updated technology provides easier navigation and broader outreach for our online community, and allows us to supply you with more information, more care, and more support as we reach out to you and honor all those who have served our nation.

We invite you to sign up now for our e-newsletters so that you can receive important messages regarding the new website launch, as well as inspirational messages and upcoming TAPS events.

Through the Internet and our website we are able to reach across the miles to link you with others who can walk with you on the journey through grief.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year... TAPS is here for YOU!

Explore our website
www.taps.org

To sign up for the E-Newsletters, go to our home page and click on 'Sign up for our E-Newsletters' in the upper right. ★



IN MEMORY



82nd Airborne Model

The men and women who courageously serve in our military exemplify leadership, valor and teamwork, all values on which BowTech is built. With every "82nd Airborne" model sold, BowTech will honor the memories of our fallen heroes by donating a portion of the proceeds to TAPS. www.BowTechArchery.com



REFUSE TO FOLLOW

This book is a wonderful resource to help children ages 5 through 12 cope with their loss and feelings of grief.



A Kid's Journey of Grief



"A Kid's Journey of Grief" engages children with activities and stories crafted in thoughtful and unique ways.

*Copies are available free of charge to all survivors by contacting the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors at (800) 959-8277 or info@taps.org.

Angels by Jasmine Crowl



“It is in the giving that we shall receive”

Another family was weeping for their loss on January 28th, 2008. Another U.S. Army soldier had lost his life, killed in action in Iraq. This young man was from my own town of Orange, California. And so I had the honor, along with five other Gold Star Mothers, of attending his memorial service to show our love and support for his family. I brought with me two stained glass Angels to present to the soldier's surviving wife

wanting to be left alone, thinking I would work through this misery somehow by myself, which I now realize, is not possible. TAPS was there for me as I went through the most difficult part of my journey. Within a few months I was introduced to Debi Wine through TAPS. Having lost a child herself, she knew my heart and encouraged me.

more than ten thousand stained glass Angels to hurting people: families who had lost a loved one in the war, people suffering from cancer, families of fallen firefighters, fallen law enforcement, and families of those who had experienced a severe tragedy. I believe that these senior volunteers are indeed Angels themselves.

Working with Angels of Love has been a healing process for me. As my journey continued toward recovery, I had the opportunity to be involved in giving the stained glass Angels to the Children's Hospital in Orange, California. For Christmas in 2007, with the other volunteers at the Angels of Love, we delivered 200 stained glass Angels one morning. It was an emotional experience for me and a blessing to see the children's eyes light up when we gave each of them a hand made stained glass Angel.



and mother... Beautiful stained glass Angels, designed by Rick Cryder, Founder and Executive Director of Angels of Love.

In order to fully understand the anguish of losing a son, one must have lost a son himself. On January 28, 2007, my son, CWO3 Cornell Chao, was killed in action in a helicopter crash in Iraq along with CPT Mark Resh. I too, had received the gift of a stained glass Angel from Rick Cryder at Angels of Love. In my pain I remember only

Seven months after Cornell had passed on, I realized that I needed involvement with others, and that I might be able to help those in pain with their own loss. I reached out to Angels of Love and offered my time as a volunteer to help make the beautiful stained glass Angels that had brought me comfort and encouragement. When I first entered the converted garage workshop of the founder, Rick Cryder, I saw six happy seniors working on the stained glass Angels. Since 1997 Rick and his volunteers had made and given

I am thankful that there are Angels surrounding us and supporting us as we are learning to cope with grief. Our loved ones are now in heaven with our God, but their memories are forever in our hearts and will never be forgotten. *

In memory of two true American heroes, helicopter pilots Chief Warrant Officer 3 Cornell Chao and Capt. Mark Resh.



Angels of Love can be reached on their web site:
www.angelslove.org or by email: angelslove7@aol.com

Holiday SURVIVAL GUIDE



1 Holiday cheer and merrymaking may be everywhere, but for those of us grieving the loss of a loved one, the holiday season can be an emotional minefield. And there's no map for easy navigation. Holidays can be particularly painful for those who are grieving a very recent loss. TAPS offers the following tips to help anyone who is grieving during the holiday season.

2 Take charge of your holiday season. Anticipating the holiday, especially if it's the first one without a cherished family member, can be worse than the 24-hour holiday itself. Taking charge of your holiday plans, and mapping out how you will spend that time, can help relieve anxiety.

3 Make plans. Plan to spend the holidays where you feel nurtured, emotionally safe, and comfortable. An escape plan may work well for some, but be aware that American holidays are celebrated in many places worldwide, and there often is no way to escape all of the holiday reminders.

4 Find sustenance for the soul. Your church, synagogue, or other faith community may offer services, resources, and support networks to help. You may want to look for a support group for people who are grieving and have suffered a similar loss. TAPS has Care Groups in many locations. Call us to find out if you are near one of them

5 Don't be afraid to change your holiday traditions. Some traditions are a comfort, while others might cause pain. Consider which traditions to keep, and which ones to forego this year. Do not feel like you have to do something simply because you have always done it that way.

6 Include your lost loved one in gift giving. Make a donation to a charity in memory of your loved one. Purchase a gift for your loved one, or on behalf of your loved one.

7 Create a tribute. Light a candle, display a favorite photograph, or set a place at the dinner table to represent the missing loved one. Consider writing a letter to your loved one about the holidays and your memories of the holidays with that person.

8 Be gentle with yourself. Realize that familiar traditions, sights, smells, and even tastes, may be comforting, or may jolt your emotions. This is the time of year when you need to be careful with your emotions and listen to yourself.

9 Attend holiday functions if you can. Consider attending holiday parties and events, especially if you'll be able to spend time with supportive family members and friends. If you think a holiday gathering might be more than you can handle, it is okay to stay home.

10 Don't pretend you haven't experienced loss. Acting as if nothing has happened does not make the pain of losing a loved one go away. Nor does it make the holidays easier to endure. Even though holiday memories may be painful, they can also be comforting. It's okay to talk with others about what you have lost, and what the holidays mean to you.

11 Pay attention to your health. It's often difficult for people who have experienced a recent loss to sleep. Make sure you get regular rest and drink lots of water. Don't over-indulge in sweets or alcohol. Talk with your medical care provider about an anti-depressant, anti-anxiety medication, or grief counseling if you feel overwhelmed.

12 Take stock of both joy and sadness. Give yourself permission to feel joy as well as sadness. Don't feel like you have to "be a certain way" because of your loss. Just be yourself. Use your creativity to write a memorial poem, create a painting, or pen a journal entry to express your feelings.

13 Share your holidays. There are many lonely people who could use company this holiday season. Consider volunteering with a local charity or soup kitchen, inviting a neighbor for dinner, or including others in your holiday activities. ☆

For more tips on dealing with grief during the holidays, go to the TAPS website at www.taps.org.

Tidings of Comfort and Joy...

Memorial Gifts for the Families of the Fallen

All over America people are caught up in the flurry of preparing gifts for Christmas: buying, wrapping, mailing, giving. Meanwhile, those of us who have experienced traumatic loss are having a hard time getting into the spirit of the season. The only gift we really want is to have our loved one back in our arms, safe and whole. Since

this is impossible, we may be able to find comfort in the extraordinary men and women who have taken on a mission of giving tangible memorial gifts to the families of the fallen, to be cherished as we sift through our memories of the one who gave so much. In the true spirit of gift-giving these organizations provide at no cost to the family, a wide

variety of gifts or services, solely to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

The list below is not a complete listing and does not imply endorsement by TAPS. Please check the websites below for further information and specific details of eligibility. ✦

- ✦ **Angels of Love** www.angelslove.org Provides a stained-glass, gold-plated Angel that is branch specific.
- ✦ **Project Never Forget** www.projectneverforget.com Provides the family one personalized 3-D photo charm memorializing their loved one.
- ✦ **Operation Thankful Nation** www.operationthankfulnation.com Provides personalized porcelain keepsake ornament and Comfort CD
- ✦ **Marine Comfort Quilts** www.marinecomfortquilts.us Provides handmade quilt to families of the fallen in any branch of the military.
- ✦ **Project Compassion** www.heropaintings.com Provides free hand painted portrait, framed and shipped.
- ✦ **Fallen Heroes Project** www.fallenheroesproject.org Free portrait of fallen soldier by artist Michael Reagan.
- ✦ **Soldiers Angels' Living Legends** www.soldiersangels.com Offers each family a wreath or live memorial tree and coordinates Portraits of Memory.
- ✦ **Operation Remembrance** www.operationremembrance.org Provides memory boxes to the families of the fallen.
- ✦ **Sacrifice for Freedom** www.sacrificeforfreedom.com Offers a small hand built memorial sculpture for families of fallen soldiers.



T★A★P★S Regional Seminars

Seminars Sponsored By:



Photos from Fort Carson, Camp Pendleton and Fort Hood

"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."

Upcoming Regional Seminars

- ★ Camp Lejeune
- ★ Camp Pendleton
- ★ Fort Bliss
- ★ Fort Bragg
- ★ Fort Carson
- ★ Fort Lewis
- ★ Fort Stewart
- ★ Hawaii
- ★ Minnesota
- ★ New York
- ★ Ohio
- ★ TAPS Parents Retreat
- ★ TAPS Spouses Retreat
- ★ TAPS Siblings Retreat



WWW.TAPS.ORG



T★A★P★S CARE GROUPS OFFER COMFORT

Grief can feel so isolating, but you don't have to be alone. Through TAPS, we have a family of thousands of others who are walking this journey with us. The heart of TAPS is our peer support network, where we find others who truly understand our grief because they have gotten that knock on the door, received that folded flag, and wear that gold star lapel pin.

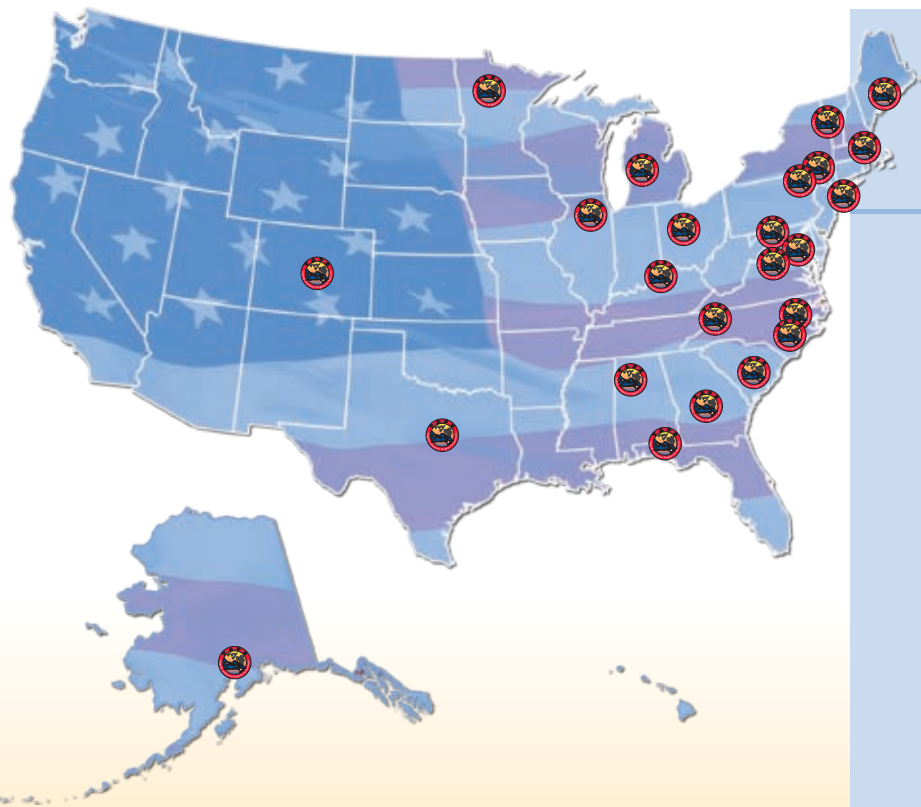
To meet the mission of facilitating peer-to-peer support for those grieving a loss in the military, TAPS encourages

and facilitates TAPS Care Groups around the country at locations where we can come together to remember the love and celebrate the lives of our loved ones, and share the journey of grief with those who truly understand.

TAPS Care Groups are informal gatherings of surviving military families, co-hosted by a TAPS Peer Mentor and a mental health professional. These groups aren't therapy groups, but they are therapeutic. They meet at a safe, easy-to-find location with parking available.

All those who are grieving the death of a loved one in the military, without regard to circumstances, relationship to deceased, branch of military service, or geography of death, are welcome to attend. There is no charge to participants, and the meetings are set at a regular time and date that best accommodates those desiring to attend.

For more information about a TAPS Care Group near you, visit www.taps.org or call 800-959-TAPS (8277). If one isn't meeting near you and you'd like to start one, we can help you! ★



TAPS Care Groups are currently going on, or getting started, in the following states:

Alabama
Alaska
Arizona
California
Colorado
District of Columbia
Florida
Georgia
Illinois
Kentucky
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts

Michigan
Minnesota
New York
Nevada
North Carolina
Ohio
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
South Carolina
Texas
Vermont
Virginia
Washington

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FROM THE WOMEN OF IRAQ

BECOMES 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 last year, 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 (Armywidow), USAFR Major.



Thank You



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- Camber Corporation
- GEICO
- Illinois Young Presidents' Organization
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*A warm smile, A friendly hug,
A word of encouragement
and hope...*

*These are the gifts
we share with you this
holiday season**



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

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Phone 24 hours a day: 800.959.TAPS (8277)



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