



Tunnel to Towers Foundation
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HOPE IN FULL BLOOM

SPRING 2022

U.S. Army Sgt. Christina Gardner (*Smart Home Recipient*)



Many of us join the military to serve our country knowing full well that we could be killed in action. The military requires life insurance and to have our last will and testament made before deploying. What we didn't plan for was being catastrophically wounded but surviving. We had to learn to live in a world that was no longer familiar to us, and learn to adapt even our basic daily activities like bathing and moving around our homes. Not knowing how to handle all of that made it hard to stay hopeful for my future but thankfully I was able to find support from other veterans living in my situation. Furthering that sense of hope was a call from the Tunnel to Towers Foundation. The potential of a wheelchair accessible smart home made me hopeful for an easier future, making so many of those little daily struggles disappear. With so many of those challenges gone, I'm now able to focus on being a Paralympic Hopeful for the 2024 Summer Paralympic Games in Paris in shot put and discus.

Christy Gardner

U.S. Army SGT

Smart Home Program Recipient

Nancy Gass (*Gold Star Home Recipient*)

What are the rules of engagement in widowhood and parenting post-loss? Widowhood certainly does not come with a manual. Parenthood has no manual and solo parenthood is off-the-charts and challenging on the regular. If you have it figured out, please let me know because I struggle daily.

Childcare challenges? Illnesses? Major life decisions? What job do I take? Is it okay to be a working mom or dad as a solo parent? Is it okay to be a stay-at-home mom or dad as a solo parent? Affirmation?! Loneliness?! Time, or lack thereof?! Parenting grieving children?! So hard. So much. So overwhelming. Fear of further loss?! Yup, there is that too. Also, for those of you parenting a Gold Star or First Responder child who has lost both of their parents, your strength and support of those children is nothing short of complete and epic heroism. You are an angel and we applaud you.

When you stop to think of all the elements of being widowed moms and dads, it might seem hopeless. So where do we find hope and how do we engage in a way that can help us survive and thrive after traumatic loss, and show that hope to our children?! In connection. In each other. In remembering you're not alone. Each of you reading this is doing it.

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Nancy Gass (*Gold Star Home Recipient*)

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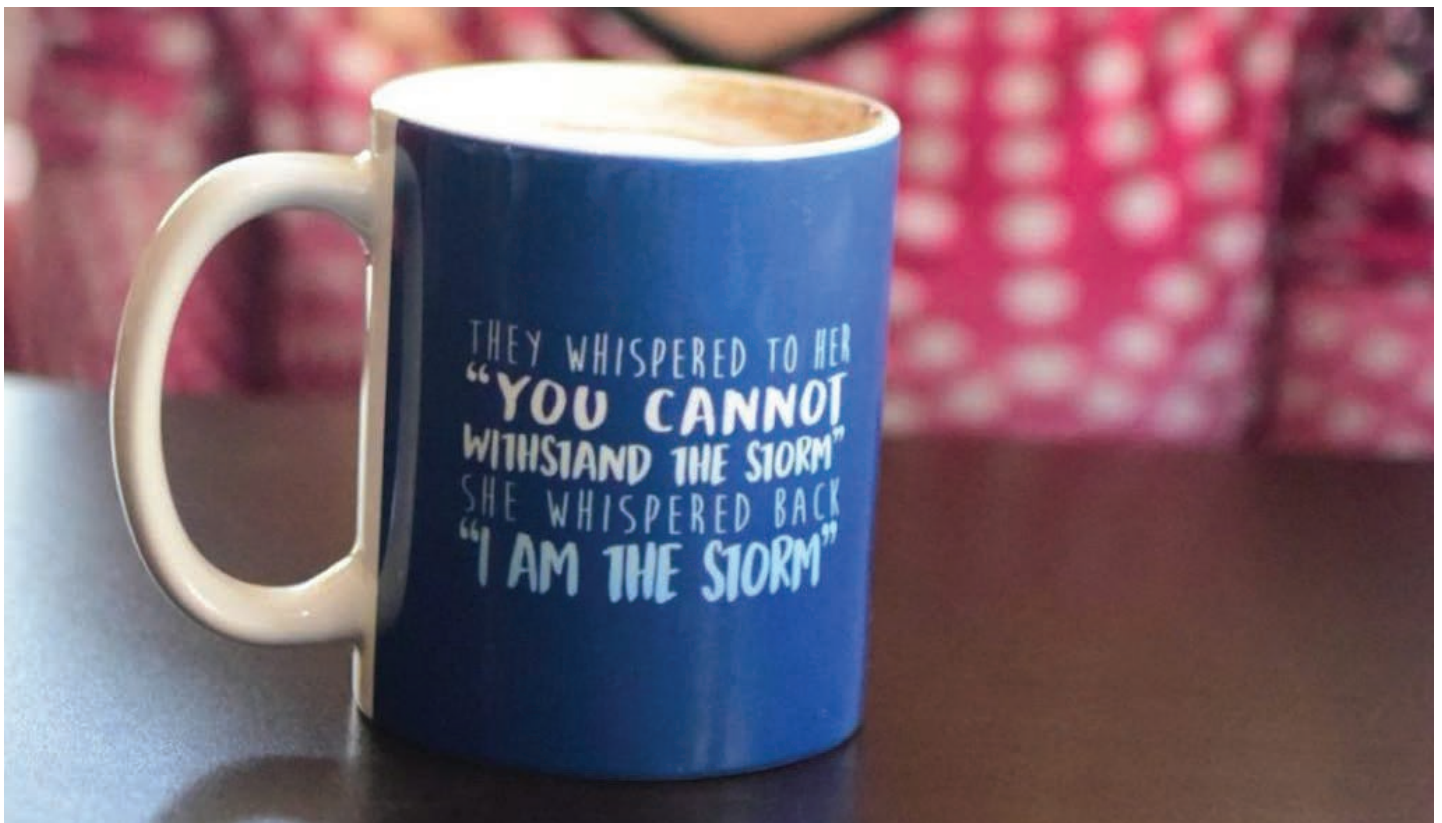
You ARE surviving and thriving after your loss even if you don't feel like you can, even though it's not fair, even though it sucks. You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have. So you keep going. Let others see you because you are inspiring my friend. Each of you is a light, even on your darkest days. Where is the hope? It is in you. It is in your eyes. It is in your heart. It shines on your children. May you let it shine.

The Tunnel to Towers In the Line of Duty Program is pleased to announce that we now have two new Case Managers on staff who are eager to connect with each of you. They can help you in finding resources such as mental health/therapeutic services for you or your children, local and national recreation activities, and educational scholarship opportunities. They are available to be a listening ear or a source of encouragement. We are pleased to introduce Amy Slaven and Christine Kearns. They can be reached via email at amy.slaven@t2t.org and christine.kearns@t2t.org, or by phone, on their direct lines: 347-352-1582 (Amy) or 347-514-8396 (Christine). Please do not hesitate to reach out. They are here for you!

Nancy Gass

Surviving Spouse of US Army SSG Jerry Gass

Gold Star Family Home Program Recipient



Mecca Nelson (*Gold Star Home Recipient*)



What is the dictionary definition of hope?

A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.

Open the doors of hope and know that all things are possible.

Hope is believing in what you've been praying for, standing for, speaking for, moving for, and understanding that all things will come into fruition.

When you think about hope in many aspects of your life, do not just focus on one aspect. Be vigilant to confirmations and signs that you might be receiving.

This is a no judgment zone.

Gain strength by grounding yourself. Take a moment to pause, pray, and meditate. Have a journal next to you to have a moment of reflection. Renew your power that you were blessed with and step outside your comfort zone. Take action through the process. Stand in your fierceness with hope and watch how the metamorphosis occurs. You will blossom like a beautiful butterfly.

Catch this with a fishing rod and reel it in nice and tight. Understanding that your words are so powerful allows yourself to speak Hope into your life. It is not easy to hold on to hope but do not become tired. Continue to push through and know that all things are possible with HOPE.

You are a beautiful precious work of art. You were made of Beauty, Grace, Faith, Love, Purpose, Peace, and Integrity. You are a blessing. There is power in the pause.

Mecca Nelson
Surviving Spouse of US Army SGT Mario Nelson
Gold Star Family Home Program Recipient



Tiffany Burgess (*Gold Star Home Recipient*)

Spring is coming up fast and breaking some of us out of a deep, dark, and cold winter. Our seasons can be so metaphorical when you need them to be, like spring being a time of rebirth and renewal. We spring into new experiences. We may recoil from a hurt but spring forward to a new normal. Hope is an optimistic driving force that could be the only thing we can grab onto through the dark and cold. We hope for many things: courage, strength, or even the will to put on regular clothes. Spring is encouraging you to see and grasp that hope. See it grow along with the beautiful flowers and you as a person. You are not alone and you are amazing for holding onto that hope even if it was all you can do.

Tiffany Burgess

Surviving Spouse of US Army SSG Bryan Allen Burgess

Gold Star Family Home Program Recipient



Hannah Oberheim (Fallen First Responder Home Recipient)



May 19th, 2021 is the day that mine and my family's world was completely turned upside down. My dad, a 20 year veteran of the Decatur and Champaign Police Departments in Illinois, was killed in the line of duty. To say this day and the months that followed were the hardest days of my life would be an understatement. I will never forget the events of that day and how they have completely reshaped my life. There have been many sleepless nights, tears, and moments of relentless grief that have overtaken myself, my mom, and my sisters throughout the past nine months. Adjusting to this new life with a huge part of our family missing has been incredibly difficult. Learning how to live without my dad and all the secondary losses that come with it has been anything but easy. Thankfully, we have had an army of blue behind us from the second we learned of my dad's death. Even though they will never be able to fully take away the pain, they have been by our side every single step of the way. This is something that I will never forget.

My family and I quickly realized in the days following my dad's death that this was so much bigger than us. From day one, there were officers from across the entire United States who showed up for my family. Locally, we had an officer sitting outside of our house 24/7 to provide us with protection and help any time we needed it. They showed up for my sister at her softball game the next day, lining the fences to support her. Three days later they stood outside of her high school graduation. At my dad's services, we met hundreds of officers from across the country, ranging from New York

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Hannah Oberheim (*Fallen First Responder Home Recipient*)

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to Texas to Arkansas to Missouri and Indiana, all traveling hundreds of miles to provide support to people they did not even know personally. They continue to show up for us months later, helping take my younger sisters to school and moving myself and my other sister out for college in the fall. Anytime we need anything, they always show up. Recently, they brought us flowers and chocolate on our first Valentine's Day without my dad. Anytime we call, they are the first to show up. I honestly cannot imagine going through this without them. During these times, myself, along with my mom and sisters, felt an intense desire to give back to the officers who gave so graciously to us in our time of need. I remember thinking, *They're here to support us, but who is there to support them?* We began brainstorming what the best way would be to make an impact, not just locally, but across the entire nation.

Due to this, my mom, sisters, and I created a non-profit foundation called Peacemaker Project 703. Peacemaker comes from my dad's favorite Bible verse, Matthew 5:9, and 703 was his badge number. Through our moments of grief, we were able to keep going by honoring my dad and his brothers and sisters in uniform. This all came about very naturally to us, in a way that I can only give credit to God for. Since the development of Peacemaker Project 703, we have been able to provide support to officers in many different ways. One of my favorite parts of our organization is that we get to advocate for the mental health of officers. I recently graduated with a degree in Psychology in December, and mental health is a passion of mine. I am currently getting my master's degree in non-profit management and have been certified to handle our new police therapy dog, Obie. Being able to incorporate my passion for mental health and love for animals all while serving the people who love us so well has been incredibly healing for me. Advocating for police officers within our community and across the country provides a lot of comfort to me, because it shows that my dad's death was not for nothing. I know that he would be so proud of all the work we are doing to make officers' lives a little bit easier in this sometimes cruel world we live in today. Creating Peacemaker Project 703 has allowed me to turn all the pain and grief I have gone through into a purpose that is so much bigger than myself or my family. We are able to give back to the people who give so much of themselves to us. I am incredibly thankful for this opportunity and will continue to work to defend the men and women in uniform who serve us on a daily basis all while honoring my dad.

Hannah Oberheim (22)
Surviving Daughter of Police Officer Christopher Oberheim
Fallen First Responder Family Home Program Recipient



"That looks heavy." said Rabbit.

"What's that?" asked Bear.

"Your thoughts." replied Rabbit.

"Let me hold them with you for a while."

"Then we'll both have heavy thoughts." said Bear.

"No." said Rabbit. "Between the two of us, they shouldn't weigh near as much."

