



Tunnel to Towers Foundation
T2T.ORG

Hope & Happiness Through the Holidays

WINTER 2022

Hope in the Darkness

Stepping back, let me just say I HOPE this is not a dark time for you. Unfortunately, sometimes after traumatic losses, things can be very dark. Loss is a long road. Trauma restructures our brain cells and we are NEVER the same... yet hope abounds.

Hope, like kindness, is a muscle. At times our muscles experience atrophy. What we need to rebuild our hope requires a whole toolbox of coping skills.

Our culture, lifestyle and marketing industry these days tend to throw unhealthy coping skills at us that are best received like balls we avoid in a game of dodgeball. I need not go into specifics — you know what I mean. Whether we are referring to substances, shopping addictions, or other unhealthy coping mechanisms, ultimately the best coping skills to toss into your toolbox often do not cost a dime.

Also, lest we shame ourselves for our unhealthy coping mechanisms, let me remind all of us, myself included, that the most effective way to dwindle those demons and grow the good is not through deprivation, but through crowding out the bad with the good.

These skills can be wrangled around the FOUR P's for Peace: Patience, Process, Persistence and Power.

For *Patience*, practice mindfulness. Learn something new. Create something. It reminds us that good things take time. Also practice detachment. Detach by changing "I am" statements to "this is" statements. An example is instead of saying, "I am depressed and lonely," say "this is a depressing and lonely time." Instead of saying, "I am late," say "this is a delay." Just detaching the momentary feelings from being married to our identities can make a big difference. Be patient with yourself as you implement these mantras into your natural thought process.

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For *Process*, think small steps and consistency over quantity. Focus on creativity and connection. For many of us, connections are the key. If you feel the weight of loneliness during this season, connection is an area where you need to focus. Step out of your comfort zone and make a connection. It might just help the other person more than it helps you.

For *Persistence*, remember this is far better than perfection. Just keep going. Feelings do pass.

For *Power*, my favorite, I mean empowerment. Empower yourself daily by fortifying your mindset with positive energy, thoughts and prayer. The power of prayer is magnificent. Prayer has been shown to reduce anxiety and depression, increase immune system functioning and enhance your self-control. Remember, as Molly Carmel wrote, "*action is a thousand times more potent than thought.*" Do not let your thoughts derail you. Let your actions build your motivation.

The last tool to throw in your toolbox, as bitter as it may taste, is unconditional acceptance. Just imagine the emotional invincibility we would have if we could practice unconditional acceptance. It does not mean we have to like our circumstances, or losses, or pain, or grief — it simply means we are not forging an internal fight of unacceptance. I think I have been sidelining that fight for over eight years now and yet it still hangs around in my subconscious, ready to rear its ugly head. I think a lot of emotional pain we feel is exacerbated by our refusal to accept our reality; our new normal. What if we could accept it? Something to think about.



As you go through your holiday season, I implore you not to get pushed into the relentless pursuit of productivity. Please slow down wherever you can and rest. As Joy Clarkson said, "*unproductive hours are the most soul-shaping parts of our lives.*" Your trauma may have rewired your brain, but I pray that this holiday season may refresh your soul.

All my love,

Nancy Gass
Surviving Spouse of US Army SSG Jerry Gass Jr.
Gold Star Family Home Program Recipient

Lifelong Hope: Relentless Fuel for Spiritual Renewal



Throughout life, HOPE is experienced when a person either intentionally or unintentionally endures a hardship or challenge. It begins at birth and manifests itself over time.

Life is full of challenges which visit us in various forms ie; emotional, academic, physical, financial and personal. Over time, HOPE is reinforced when you are confronted with an obstacle and then aggressively pursue a reasonable pathway to accomplishing the goal. Having HOPE does not always result in a successful outcome.

Success is then measured by your commitment and your enduring, relentless spirit to overcome the challenge. It is not uncommon to suffer setbacks during life, but how we respond to them is critical to managing the next dilemma...

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As an amateur boxer, I learned early on that setbacks are common. I learned to get through each round, committed to making certain the “next round” will be more productive. I prayed and HOPED prior to each bout for a safe, successful conclusion.

As a father, I prayed and HOPED during each of my wife’s four pregnancies.

As a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division, I prayed and HOPED prior to each jump for a successful outcome.

As a member of the New York City Police Department, I prayed and HOPED for a speedy recovery and return to work after suffering a gunshot wound to the abdomen.

As a “First Responder” to the tragic events on 9/11/2001, I pray for the victim’s families and HOPE never again, do we have to endure the consequences of terrorism.

As a father, I pray and HOPE for the safe return of my son and our military personnel deployed overseas.

As a wheelchair dependent quadriplegic at the age of 48, who suffered a spinal cord injury during an overseas assignment, I pray and HOPE each day to continue enjoying life with the same vigor, enthusiasm and drive as before. Family, Friends and Faith have nourished my spirit of HOPE which is endlessly challenged. I get depressed, I get angry and then I get motivated. HOPE is always a moment away.

The foundation of HOPE is inherently within each of us and becomes infectious and inspirational. It not only motivates us but even strengthens those around us. HOPE becomes the endless fuel necessary for our survival and advancement. Nothing humans have already achieved should be foreign to us or accepted as a boundary.

As we celebrate this Holiday Season, we all have the ability to impact a person’s level of HOPE. Our actions, deeds, gestures and voices possess the unique ability to effect a positive change in life.

The traditional demonstrations of this HOLIDAY SEASON are visual reminders that as Americans, we cherish and embrace the moments of giving and the expressions of freedom, joy and gratitude.

Those around us have contributed immensely to our HOPEFULNESS. It has been transformed into a reality.

The Tunnel To Towers Foundation has provided individuals struggling to be HOPEFUL with a new and meaningful beginning.

NYPD Detective 1st Grade Terrence McGhee
First Responder/Smart Home Program Recipient

Christmas Complete

Before Pat passed, there was a Christmas when I was SO STRESSED with things to do hoping to make Christmas everything it was supposed to be. I hadn't yet wrapped the gifts that we had just purchased last minute in the nick of time. Our older children would be coming home for our family Christmas soon, before heading to Virginia, where we saw our families. I was still washing clothes to get packed up to go; I hadn't done any baking, nor sent out any Christmas cards; Boy did I feel like a LOSER!!! On top of that the house needed a big touch up...

Everything seemed turned upside down! My heart was pounding and on top of it all I was so tired, and beginning to despair! I started to cry when a still, small voice said, "Make a list!"

I'm like, "Make a list? I don't have time to make a list! I've got too much to do!!!" Again I heard, "Make a list!" to which I thought, "Oh Ugh... ok I'll make the list..."

It went something like this:

1. Wrap the gifts
2. Vacuum
3. Laundry/fold
4. Pack for me and two of our children
5. Get to the bank
6. Fill the suburban up with gas
7. Cards
8. Bake some cookies
9. Do the dishes before you leave



I can't remember them all, but I do remember feeling like a cinder block was on top of my chest! The same small voice said, "Go down your list." I began to feel the presence of the Lord and felt a little lighter; I started with number 1.

As I read each one, I sensed the Good Lord say, "Yes do that one now." or, "Wait on that one," or, "Don't do that one at all." For other things on the list, I heard, "Tomorrow," or "Get one of the children to help with that one."

Finally, I heard, "**Do Not Be Afraid...Everything's going to be alright.**" And PRAISE GOD it was! Thank God!

It was a wonderful Christmas complete with peace and joy! I pray yours will be the same this coming Christmas season and remember, nothing is too big for our God! And by the way, I still remember to make these lists on occasion today when I am overwhelmed...

Here are some scriptures I frequently lean on that could maybe help you this Christmas: Psalm 91, 1 Corinthians 13, The Book of 1 John, 1 Kings 17, and Hebrews 11.

Terry Carothers
Surviving Spouse of USMS Deputy Commander Patrick T. Carothers
Fallen First Responder Home Program Recipient



Hope and a Future



The holidays can be especially hard after losing a loved one, but our past memories with them and making memories with our loved ones in the future drives us forward.

Holiday spirit is about embracing the ones around you, being thankful for the blessings in our lives, and moving forward into a new year filled with new hopes and dreams.

My family is my hope and my future. They give me the strength to move forward with a happy heart. While it's been an exceptionally hard year, I make sure to take time to myself so that I can remember all of the positivity and support that I have around me.

People from all over the country stood by me and my family in our darkest hour. When I wanted to close myself off and shut out the world, people were there with open hands and willingly pulled me up.

The generosity and kindness of those people kept me from falling back when I felt like I couldn't stand on my own two feet. I've been blessed that I not only had the strength of my family and friends, but I also had thousands of strangers who were ready to stand by me. Reminding myself of that helps my heart heal and gives me peace of mind. I pull those around me from my strength and in doing so they give me the faith to press on. I'm so grateful for those around me and for the memories that I will get to make.

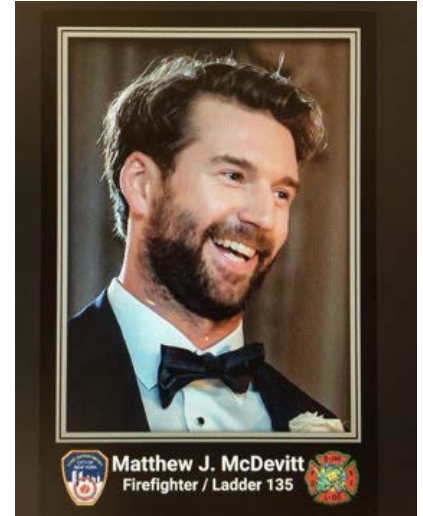
Natasha Ogilvie
Surviving Spouse of Covington Police Officer Caleb Daniel Ogilvie
Fallen First Responder Home Program Recipient

Moments of “Happy” Within Your “Holidays”

After losing my husband Matt, a 31-year-old FDNY Firefighter, common phrases took on a totally new meaning. Casual sayings such as, “Happy Holidays,” seemed to add to my sadness.

Christmas was always my favorite holiday and our first holiday season without Matt was 2 months after he had passed. If it weren’t for my then 5-month-old daughter and 2-year-old son, I probably would not have celebrated.

I didn’t want to watch my favorite romantic holiday comedies. I didn’t want to look at Christmas cards that we had received, displaying perfect little intact smiling families. In fact, I couldn’t imagine sending Christmas cards ever again. I couldn’t even fathom taking a family photo without Daddy in it...



The rest of the world continued as normal; lights went up, carols were sung, families gathered, yet all I could think of was that Matt would not be here to spend Christmas, or any other holiday with us moving forward.

I remember listening to a podcast, hosted by a fellow widow, who discussed ways to cope with grief during the holiday season. She validated the way that I was feeling and mentioned that she skipped Thanksgiving after losing her husband. She pretended it was an average Thursday and ordered pizza. She also mentioned that although we may have guilt we need to create and maintain family traditions, just because we eat pizza this Thanksgiving does not mean we cannot resume or rebuild traditions moving forward.

Each year became a little less painful and Christmas has quickly reclaimed its spot as my favorite holiday once again. I know that Matt would want me to feel merry again, and I do. He would want the kids to share in that excitement, and they most certainly do. I even found love again, a chapter that I know Matt helped orchestrate. I feel very blessed for every day that I am given, especially the holidays, and knowing how finite life is only strengthens my gratitude.

Grief never ends — it becomes a part of your being. The best way to honor your person is to fall in love with life again and be kind to yourself, especially on the holidays.

They are always with you, surrounding you with light and love.

My advice to all those struggling this season:

1. Be gentle with your little soul. If you don’t want to send Christmas cards, don’t. I still haven’t. That doesn’t mean I never will, but for now it does not feel right.
2. If you want to ignore a holiday because it’s too painful for you, you go right ahead. You can always resume, but you deserve to take the time you need.
3. Surround yourself with others who share in your grief, especially during the holidays.
4. Don’t “should” yourself. Don’t put pressure on yourself to do what you think you “should” or “shouldn’t” do. This could mean attending a friend’s social gathering, going to the cemetery, or

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hanging your person's stocking. If it heightens your grief then you are allowed to skip.

5. Incorporate your person into your holidays in whichever way makes your heart happy. Say their names, pour them a drink, pray for them, tell stories, sing their favorite song, watch their favorite movie, or if too challenging don't do anything at all. There is no right way to do this.
6. Realize that if "Happy Holidays" seems unattainable, make your goal to find happy moments throughout the holidays.

I hope you all find moments of happiness throughout your holiday season.

Thank you to our first responders and to those who serve and have served our beautiful country.

God bless you all,

Jackie McDevitt
Surviving Spouse of FDNY Firefighter Matthew J. McDevitt
Fallen First Responder Home Program Recipient



Roger's Christmas Village



Although we can say *Merry Christmas* again, it didn't happen overnight. With time, Tunnel to Towers, and a tiny village we found a way.

When I lost Roger on June 29, 2009, the dark, jagged shadow of sorrow encapsulated me, imprisoned me in my present grief, denied me a clear view of a future, and it firmly obstructed my memories of the past. I turned my head away from Roger's favorite holiday, Christmas, holiday meals at our family table with spirited little boys, and even our snowy Yuletide wedding:

On a snowy December night in 1995, the white gazebo in Easthampton, MA was nestled safely inside the town rotary, the circular roof lazily draped with white Christmas lights revealed the freshly fallen snow, illuminated the path I would take in my rented wedding dress, the one that would lead me to my Marine in his dress blues. He was smiling.

With our dearest loved ones as witnesses, we sealed our marriage with a kiss, then celebrated our union at the local American Legion. Our colors were red and green to complement the season. Red roses topped our white cake, and red and green balloons, as many as our budget allowed, danced on the ceiling while their ribbons gently swayed. We had ten days left in Massachusetts before we would begin our trek to Camp Lejeune, NC to begin our life together. In that short amount of time, we would celebrate Christmas with our families.

"Open it!" Roger said, looking a little nervous as he handed me a gift the size of a tissue box. We both sat on our knees on the floor of my parents' living room.

I shyly peeled away the thin wrapping paper to reveal a ceramic bookstore with a hole in the back to place a tiny lightbulb.

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"You always loved your Aunt Pat's village," he said.

"I love it!" I said to him. He smiled and relaxed his shoulders.

I learned Roger's love for Christmas very early in our marriage. *"Do we have ten dollars?"* he asked me.

"I think I have a five and some ones in my purse or look in the change jug. There should be coin wrappers in there, too," I answered.

He went into our room and came back a few minutes later with an orange roll of quarters in his hand. Ten dollars. *"I'll be back in a bit,"* he said. I chuckled to myself at this *"big bad Marine"* and his obsession with figurines.

About an hour later he walked into the house with an accidental grin, another power strip, some fake snow, and a tiny wishing well.

I imagined his obsession with it would pass like a phase, a fad, but it didn't. Instead, it grew.

Years later, we would find ourselves with four sons, Tyler, Samuel, Maxwell, and Baylee. We had a very sweet and very small three-bedroom house in Jacksonville, NC.

"I need to get a sheet of plywood," he said. He was sitting on the floor surrounded by extension cords and bright white pillow stuffing.

"Wow for what!?"

"I can't fit the village on the piano anymore." His compact collection grew from four village pieces to fifteen or more with roads, skating rinks, and overflowing handfuls of miniature pine trees.

"Hun, we don't have the room," I said.

Every holiday season, once it was all set up, there was a grand reveal. The boys and I would all sit in a dark room on a silent night, our faces aimed at the tiny houses.

"Ready?" he would say nervously.

"Yes!" We all giggled.

He would plug in the lights and the little town would come to life.

The tiny village grew each year, and from 1996 until 2008 he added to it. The years he was deployed for training or for war, I would slap it up and take a quick photo to send to him. It made me miss him more, but I knew I had to do it. It was my obligation.

After June 29, 2009, that obligation became permanent.

Roger was a Marine, an EMT, a firefighter, and while serving in the NC Army National Guard, he was killed in Iraq. The Humvee he was driving hit an IED that was buried in the sand. He was killed instantly.

We suffered the deepest sorrow and didn't know how to go on. We were lost and consumed with sadness. The months after he died dashed by and before we knew it, the holidays appeared. The desire to ignore

Christmas tempted me, but instead I quickly set up his village, plugged in the power strip with shaking hands, and my voice cracked as I quietly said, "ready?" I thought it would break me, but I felt a little lighter, almost energized.

The village homes have always seemed to contain love and warmth. Roger's Christmas spirit lights them, warms them, and brings them to life. Through the tiny windows I see Christmas Eves from the past when he would become giddy. I see him in his flannel pajamas, the first one awake on Christmas morning, sweet coffee in his hand, his crooked smile.

Years later, the boys and I decided to move to MA. It didn't take long for us to realize it was a mistake. We felt trapped and were desperate to move back to North Carolina, but with high taxes and the pandemic, we could not make it happen. We were not able to spend Christmas with our oldest son, Tyler, and our hope was fading. Gloomy moods threatened our holiday, but Roger's village gave us hope.

It sat on our mantle, warm lights mirroring that hope. I knew Roger heard me. I hoped he heard me.

"Hun, please help us find our way home," I whispered.

Weeks later, on my birthday, I received a phone call. It was Nancy Gass from Tunnel to Towers.

"Guess what!" she said to me. Her voice was excited.

"What?"

"You're getting a house!"

Tunnel to Towers was going to send us home! No longer would we be separated for Sunday dinners, sunrises at the beach, and especially Christmas. Home.

Tunnel to Towers gave us a house, but they also gifted us with time. Time to understand our grief. Time to simply figure it all out. When I set up his village for the first time in our new home, I did it slowly. I bought new bulbs and glued together the tiny chips of ceramic that rested at the bottom of the plastic storage bin. I added a pair of yellow chickens and a small flagpole with our nation's colors to stand proudly next to the fire department.

I do feel, though, that the obsession with making the village perfect and needing to add a little to it each year has occupied my Christmas spirit. It's like Roger is over my right shoulder saying, "You really do need to buy that covered bridge" or "I think you need to add more evergreens." It is an honor to take the reins of his sleigh with ungloved hands.

The boys will still wait in a dark room until I say "ready?" and we ooh and ahh after I press the orange button on the power strip. We cry still, but not every year.

The boys and I stare into the little bookstore and sense its warmth. For me, the fire department is where I feel his presence the most. Roger's tiny village offers me hope, time has shown me how to run towards the memories and not hide from them, and now, thanks to Tunnel to Towers, we are truly home. We can say *Merry Christmas again*, and we freely and sincerely mean it.

Teresa Forester Adams
Surviving Spouse of U.S. Army SGT Roger Leeroy Adams Jr.
Gold Star Family Home Program Recipient

The Russell F. Siller Memorial Scholarships

To honor the memory of Russell F. Siller, who was an educator for fifty years and a bright, guiding light to his students, the Tunnel to Towers 9/11 Institute™ is pleased to announce the Russell F. Siller Memorial Scholarships.

These scholarships will be awarded to children of accepted Tunnel to Towers Foundation In the Line of Duty Home Program recipients who are exemplary Junior and Senior high school students preparing for college or vocational college.

Russell's legacy of selflessness and the importance of education will be carried forward through financial scholarships of up to \$10,000 to aid students in their educational needs and for creating a meaningful project or act that is beneficial to spreading awareness to a community-based issue.

Applicants will be required to make a video submission as part of their application, detailing how they are doing good and contributing their time and effort to spreading awareness to their cause. To learn more visit: <https://t2t.org/9-11-institute/russell-f-siller-memorial-scholarships/>.



“Thinking Outside the Box” Gift Ideas for the Holidays!

Experiences

- Concert Tickets
- Sporting Tickets
- Movie Passes
- Golf Passes
- Symphony
- Community Theater
- Restaurant Gift Card
- Indoor Rock Climbing
- Bowling Passes
- Summer Camp
- Hot Air Balloon Ride
- Massage Gift Card
- Nail Spa Gift Card
- Photography Session Gift Certificate

Classes

- Cooking
- Dance
- Sports
- Swimming
- Music
- Internet Master Class
- Coding
- Painting/Art
- Scuba Diving
- Private Coaching
- Physical Trainer

Time

- Babysitter
- House Cleaner
- Professional Organizer
- Yard Service
- Date Night Out
- Oil Change
- Car Wash Gift Certificate

Memberships

- Children’s Museum
- Zoo
- Theme Park
- Trampoline Park
- Art Museum
- Gym
- Science Museum
- State Parks
- Consumables
- Fruit Basket
- Chocolates
- Coffee Beans
- Coffee Gift Card
- Local Food
- Desserts/Candies
- Meats/Cheese/Popcorn/Nuts

