

# HEROIC HEARTS



BY SIENNA LAWTON





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# CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING LOSS



When a family member dies, it is both shocking and confusing. It makes us feel sad and angry. We may want comfort but also feel very alone.

At Heroic Hearts, we want to honor and remember your loved one, encouraging you to express your feelings of loss and grief. Our mission is to support you as your loved one supported our country.





# What is loss?



Loss is the absence of a significant person, object, or experience. It can take many forms, such as the end of a relationship or the death of a loved one. It creates complex emotions that come with it.





# What is grief?

Grief is the emotional response to loss, which can manifest in guilt, anger, confusion, and sadness. Grief affects each person differently.

Everyone experiences and processes grief differently. There is no right way or wrong way to grieve.



# Activity

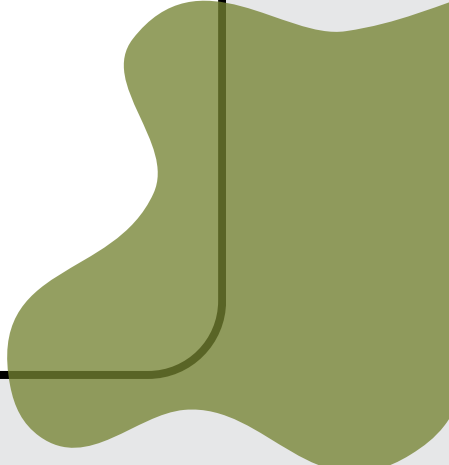

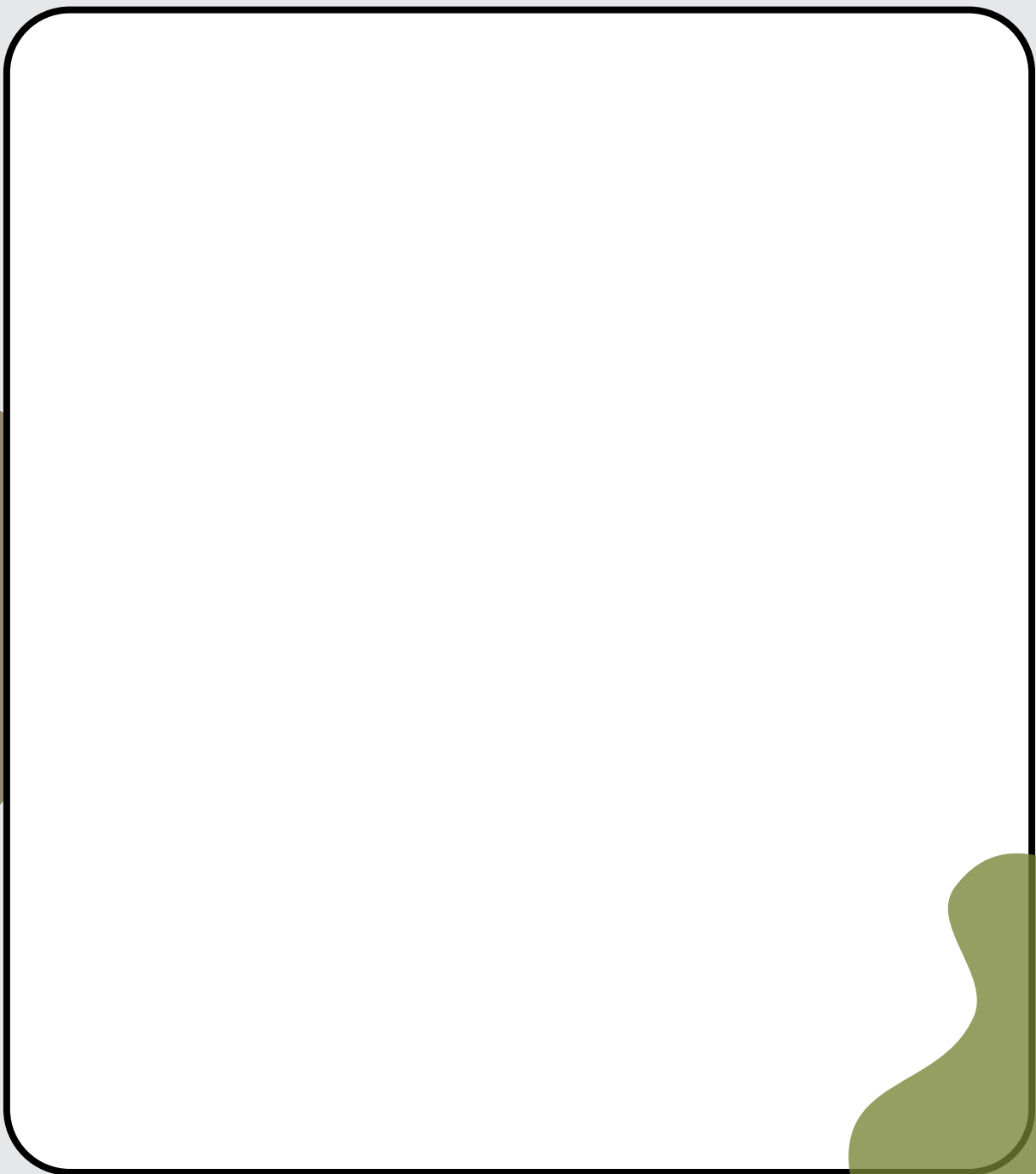
Write down the feelings you have when you are in grief. Are any of the feelings overpowering you?

A blank notepad with a yellow cover and silver rings. The notepad is open, showing a blank white page. The cover is a solid yellow color. The rings are silver and are attached to the top of the page. The notepad is positioned in the lower half of the image, below the text.



# Activity

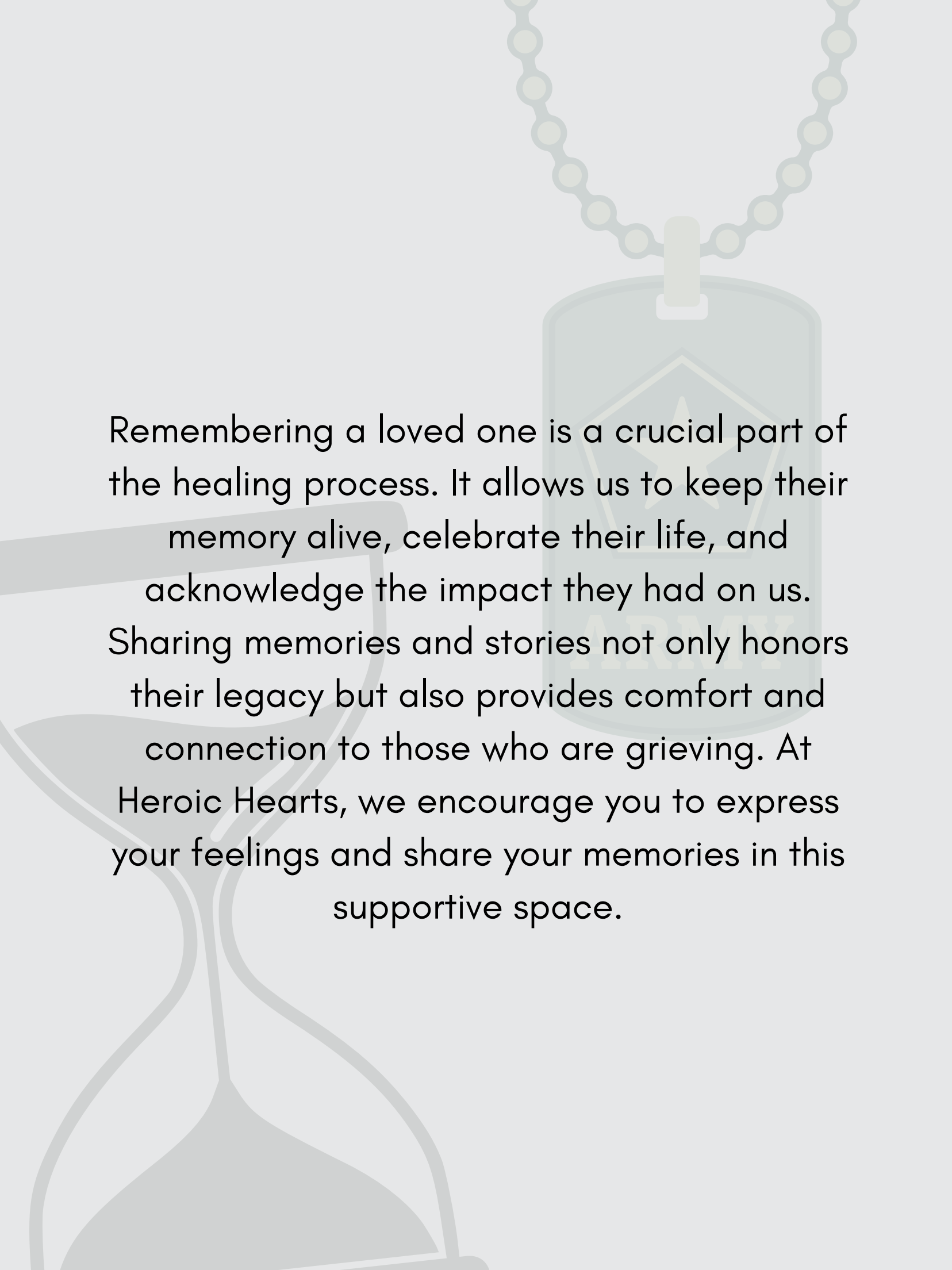
Draw a picture of what you think your grief  
looks like





# CHAPTER 2: REMEMBERING OUR HEROES



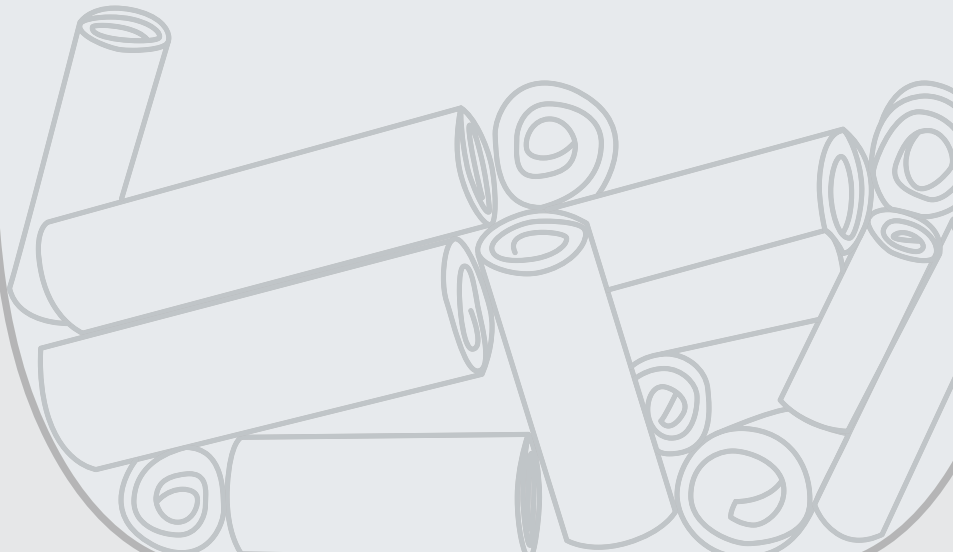


Remembering a loved one is a crucial part of the healing process. It allows us to keep their memory alive, celebrate their life, and acknowledge the impact they had on us. Sharing memories and stories not only honors their legacy but also provides comfort and connection to those who are grieving. At Heroic Hearts, we encourage you to express your feelings and share your memories in this supportive space.

# Activity: The Memory Jar

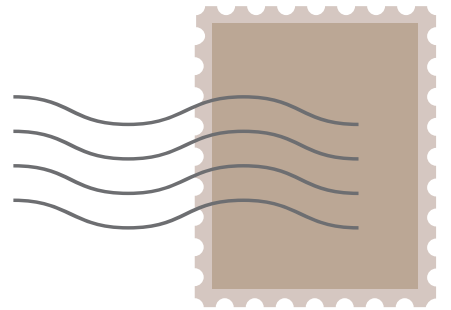
Take a cup or jar and pieces of paper. On the pieces of paper, answer the questions below

1. Describe a favorite day you spent with a loved one. What made it so special?
2. What is one skill or lesson your loved one taught you?
3. What is one funny memory?
4. What do you miss most about your loved one?



# Activity: The Memory

Write a post card to your loved one today.  
What will you tell them?



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## CHAPTER 3: THE JOURNEY OF GRIEF



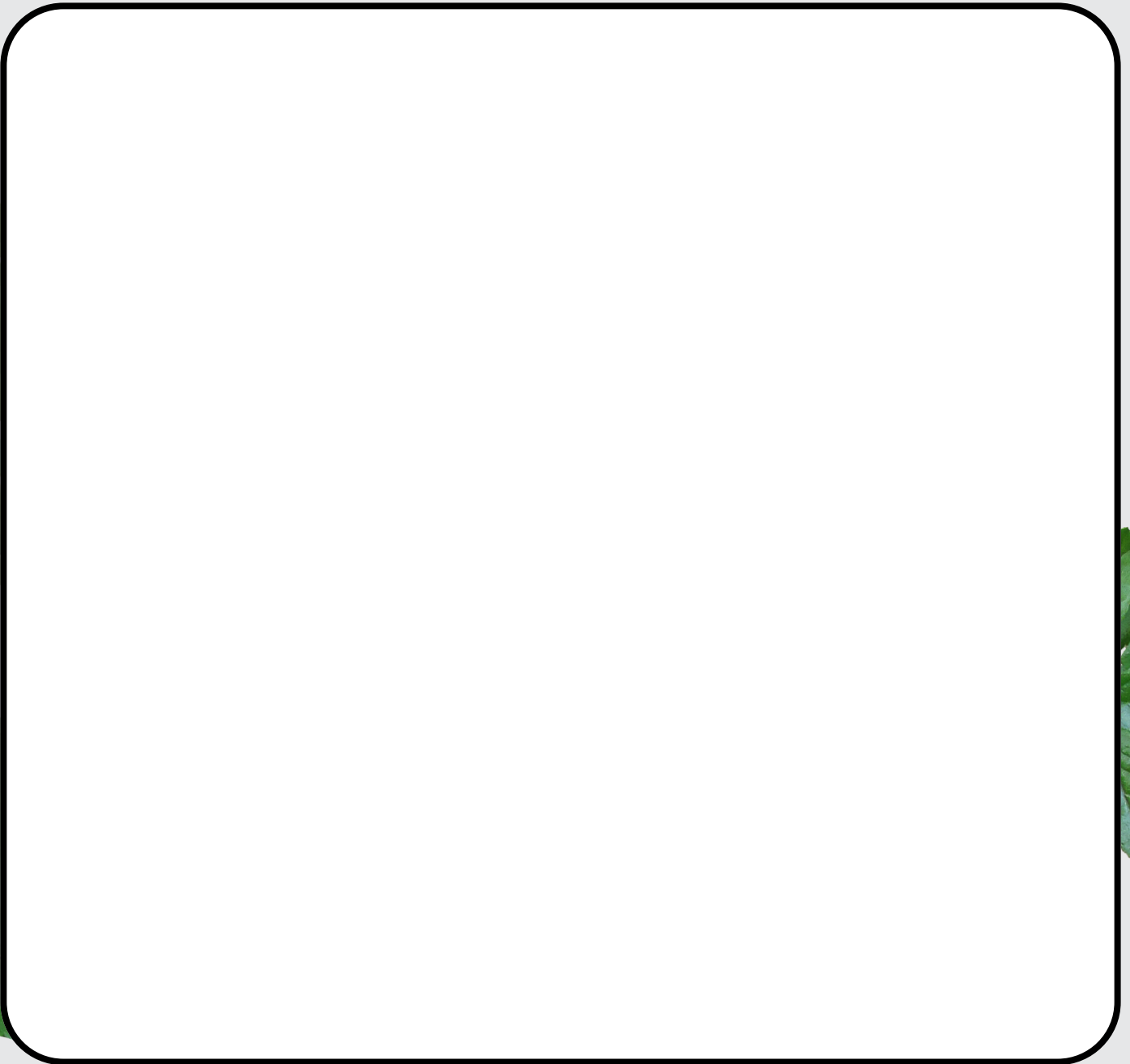
Grief is a deeply personal and unique journey.

While some may experience it as a straightforward path, others may find it more like a winding road with twists and turns. It's important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Everyone's experience is different, and it's okay to take the time you need to navigate your own path.



# Activity: Trees

Trace your hand, and draw two branches off each finger. On the branches, draw some leaves. In those leaves, write people, things, and places that you are grateful for.

A large white rectangular area with rounded corners and a black border, intended for drawing and writing. It is surrounded by green leafy branches on the left, right, and bottom edges.

# Feelings Faces

Pick four feelings and draw the faces below!

What is different about each face? What things are the same? Share examples of when you've experienced each of these feelings!

What makes  
you feel this  
way?



When's the  
last time  
you felt this  
way?



What do you do  
when you're  
feeling like this?



When's the  
last time  
you made  
someone  
feel this  
way?



Name a  
person, place,  
or thing that  
makes you feel  
this way!



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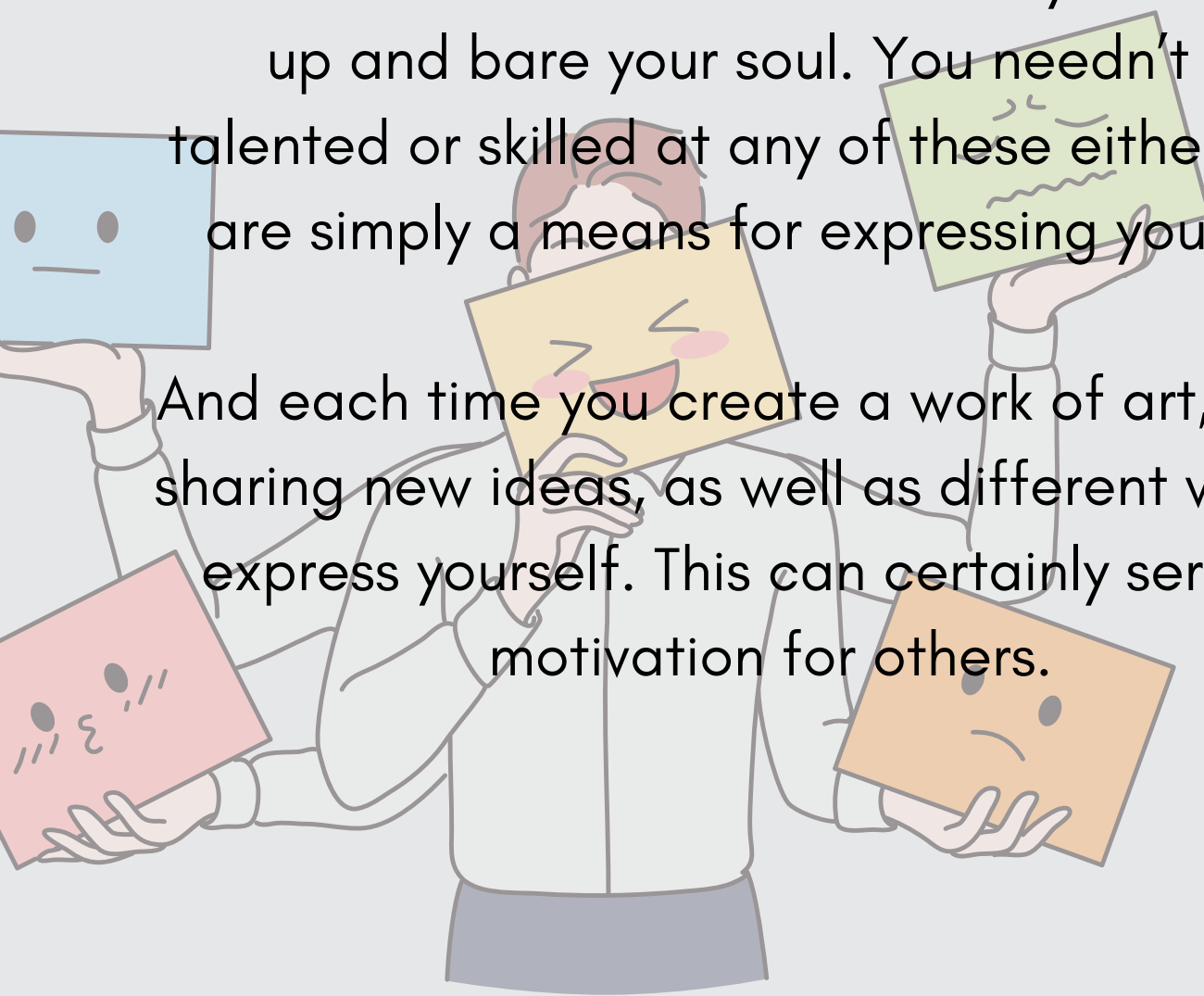
# CHAPTER 4: EXPRESSING FEELING THROUGH ART



In order for emotions to move through us freely, they must be accepted and expressed. Doing so enlivens us and fuels our creativity. Fortunately, experiencing emotions directly through art is fairly simple – if you allow for the process.

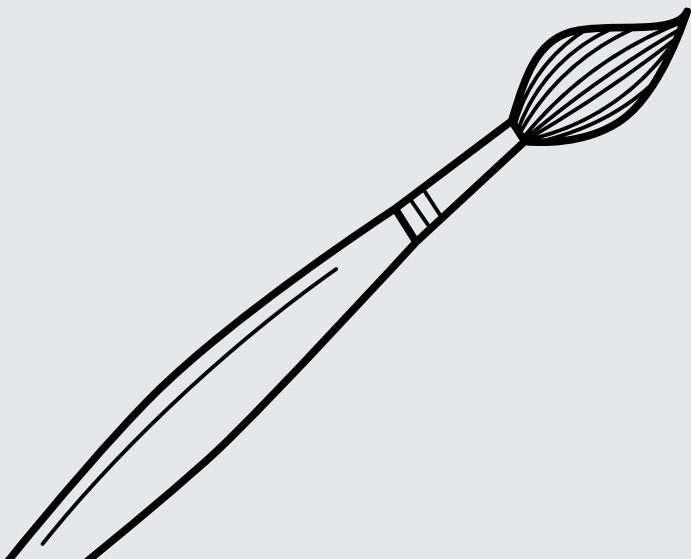
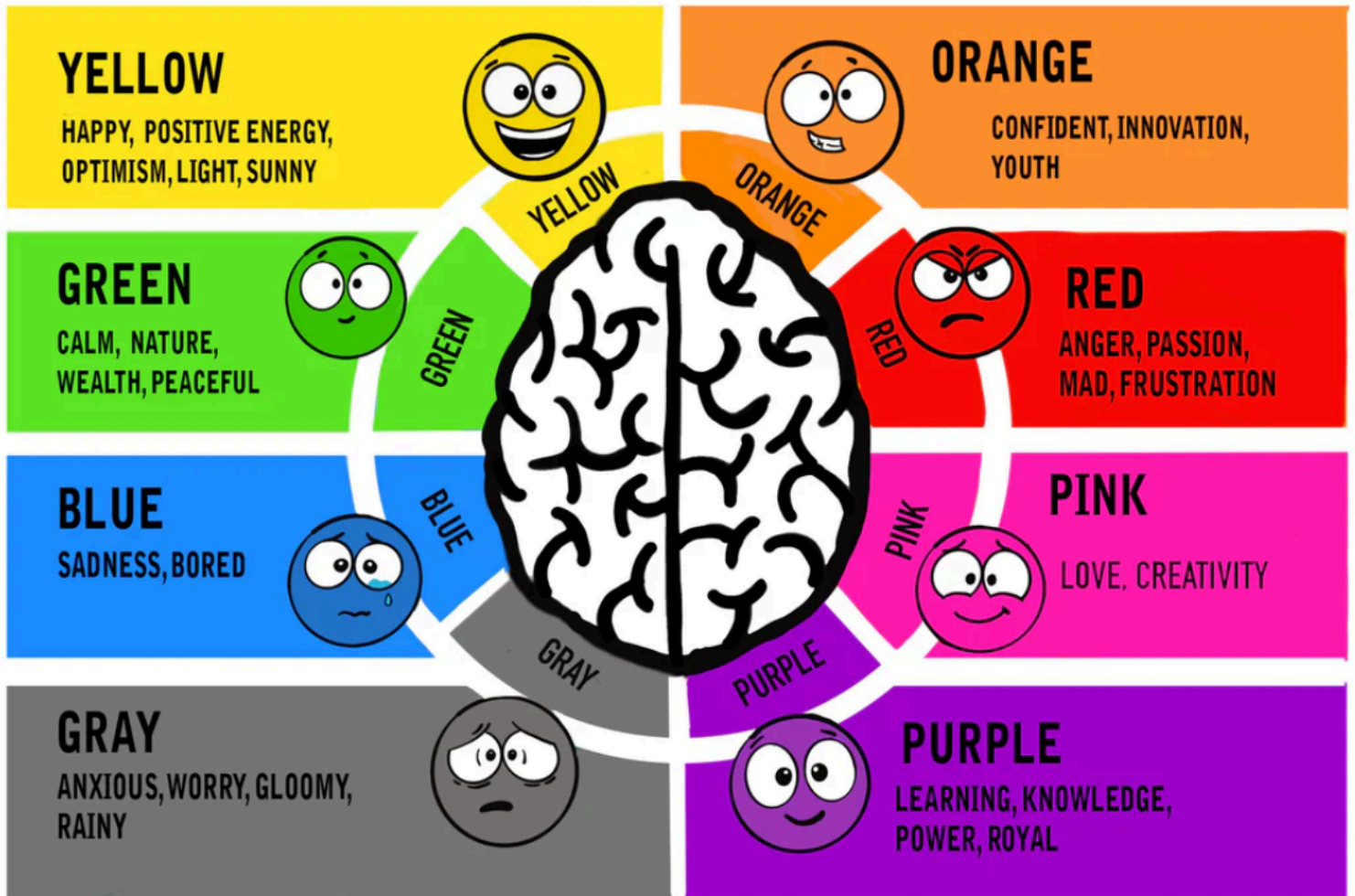
This could be done drawing, painting, sculpting, music, movement, writing, drama, whatever creative means allows you to open up and bare your soul. You needn't be talented or skilled at any of these either. They are simply a means for expressing yourself.

And each time you create a work of art, you're sharing new ideas, as well as different ways to express yourself. This can certainly serve as motivation for others.



# A LITTLE SPOT and COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

CONNECTING COLOR AND EMOTIONS



WHAT WAYS DO YOU LIKE TO  
EXPRESS YOURSELF?

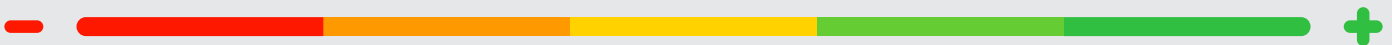


WHAT COLORS DO YOU FEEL  
EXPRESS YOU?



# Activity: Express Yourself

Pick a creative way to express yourself and what you are feeling. Could be writing, drawing, music, pictures... you pick!





# CHAPTER 5: STRENGTH IN STORIES



**READ THE FOLLOWING TWO  
STORIES AND REFLECT ON YOUR  
OWN EXPERIENCES**







# ARMY VETERAN, GOLD STAR MOTHER SHARES HER SON'S STORY TO HONOR HIS MEMORY

By Spc. Joshua Taeckens September 23, 2023

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO FORT SAM HOUSTON, Texas – “I still hear his voice each day, and I dread the day that I forget what that voice sounds like,” Retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Candy Martin’s voice shook as she spoke to a crowd of U.S. Army South Soldiers at the Fort Sam Houston Theatre, Sept. 21, 2023.

Martin became a Gold Star Mother on Oct. 14, 2007, when she lost her son, 1st Lt. Thomas Martin, who tragically died from wounds suffered after insurgents attacked his unit during combat operations in Al Busayifi, Iraq.

A resilient legacy of her son’s service and sacrifice, Martin has dedicated her life to honoring her son and supporting fellow Gold Star Mothers and Families.

Martin spoke of the Gold Star history and how the Families of Soldiers fighting in World War I would display a banner brandishing a star, one for each immediate Family member serving, on a door or in a window of their home. A blue star represented the living, and a gold star signified they died on the battlefield.

According to the Arlington National Cemetery, in 1928, a group of 25 women whose sons sacrificed their lives came together to form the American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., and in 1936, Congress designated the last Sunday in September as Gold Star Mother's Day, now known as Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day.

Martin's Family history of military service predates the Gold Star, with an ancestor from every generation serving the nation since the American Revolution. Her son wanted to continue that Family legacy for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons.

“When he applied to West Point in high school, his boyhood aspiration, he was denied admission, so after high school, he enlisted in the Army,” said Martin. “As an enlisted Soldier, he again applied for West Point and was accepted after three years of enlisted service.”

Martin's son graduated from West Point in 2005 and deployed as a sniper-scout platoon leader with 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006. This was only one month after his mom returned from her own combat tour to Iraq.

About halfway through his deployment, her son returned home for rest and recuperation leave. Martin and her son had a conversation before she had to take him back to the airport.

“I was telling him all the reasons why I hated for him to go back,” said Martin. “I knew that he was experiencing things that no mother ever wanted their child to go through.”

She said his response was short but powerful: "Mom, it's what we do."

"That was the last time I ever saw my son face to face," Martin said solemnly.

Martin returned to Iraq, and his then-fiancée, 1st Lt. Erika Holowina, was deployed in the same area as a MedEvac pilot. Coincidentally, she was supporting his unit.

In the early morning hours of Oct. 14, 2007, a MedEvac request came in while Holowina was on duty.

"When the nine-line call came across, she knew it was Tom," said Martin.

Martin's son had been shot, and despite medical personnel's best efforts, he was pronounced dead shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Martin remembers the day she received the casualty notification about her son.

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Martin remembers the day she received the casualty notification about her son.

"It was an Army South Soldier who came to our door," Martin said with tears in her eyes. "We were waiting for the casualty assistance team to come, and I looked at my husband and said, 'The Army has got this. I know they will get him home.'"

Her Family had to grieve before they could welcome the Gold Star Mothers and Families community into their lives, but Martin said she encourages others to find something to focus on to surpass the pain.

"I believe that self-contained grief can become self-destructive," she claimed. "Therefore, for those of you going through tough times and self-contained grief, I encourage you to devote your time to something bigger than yourself."

Martin has turned her grief into a mission to memorialize her son's legacy, and in doing so, she has discovered that talking about him helps heal the pain.



"It's hard, but we never get tired of talking about our loved ones," she said. "You'll learn that the conversations get easier, and they're so healing not only for us as Family members but also for people who knew him."

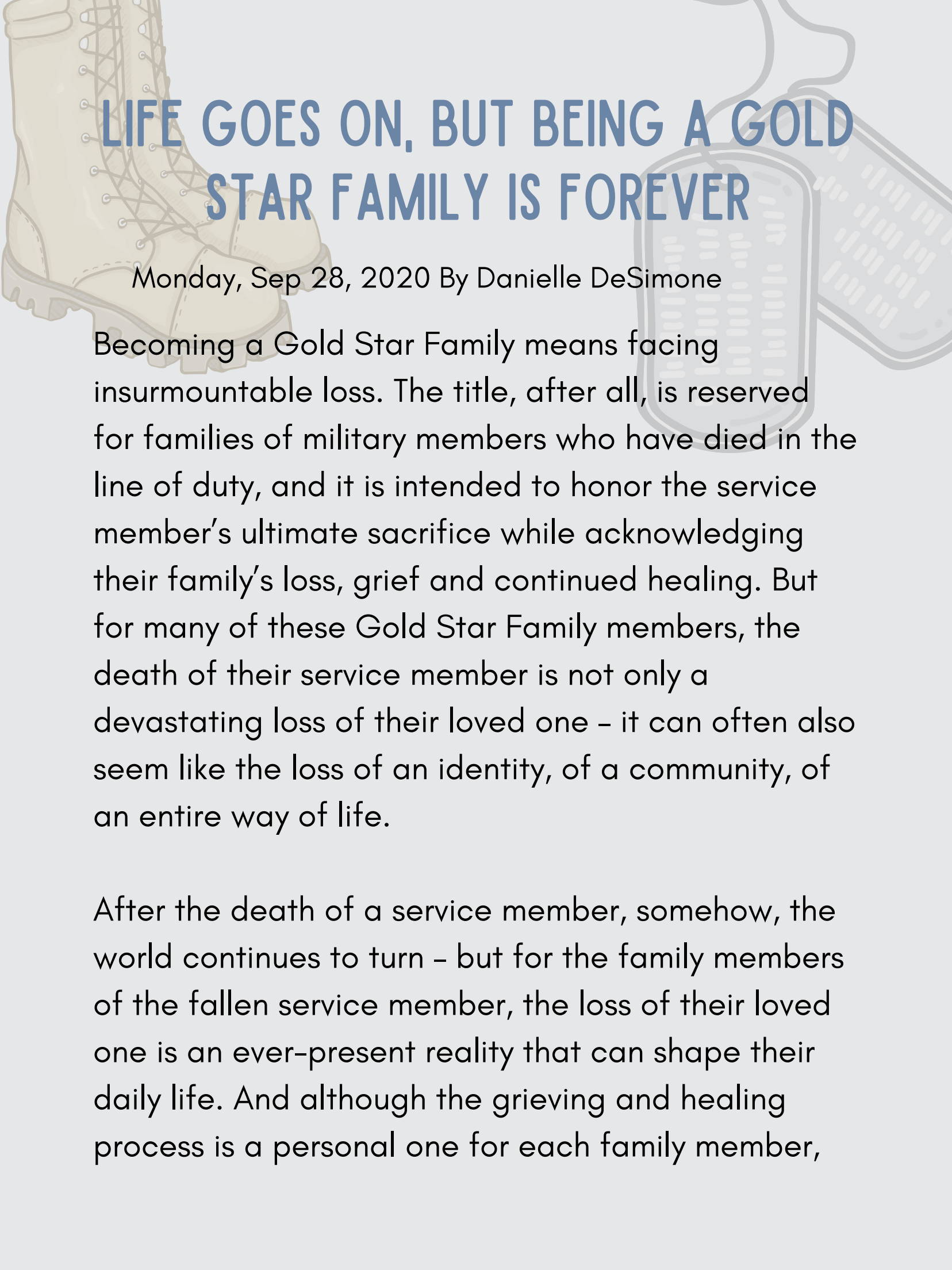
Martin has journeyed across the U.S., speaking to news outlets as well as private and public organizations. She has also appeared on TV shows and podcasts, focusing her energy on spreading her son's story and awareness about Gold Star Mothers and Families.

Family and friends started the 1LT Tom Martin Memorial Foundation with the goal of preserving his memory by supporting the organizations that made him into the leader he was.

With all the positive change she has created from her son's death, she still fears the world will forget the men and women who have died serving their country. With that fear in mind, she asked a favor of all in attendance at the theater.

“Ask Gold Star Families questions,” Martin said with hope. “All you have to do is walk up, indicate toward the Gold Star on their lapel and say, ‘Tell me the story behind your star.’ We talk about our kids, but we don't dwell on their death. We dwell on how they lived and what they did to make the world a better place.”





# LIFE GOES ON, BUT BEING A GOLD STAR FAMILY IS FOREVER

Monday, Sep 28, 2020 By Danielle DeSimone

Becoming a Gold Star Family means facing insurmountable loss. The title, after all, is reserved for families of military members who have died in the line of duty, and it is intended to honor the service member's ultimate sacrifice while acknowledging their family's loss, grief and continued healing. But for many of these Gold Star Family members, the death of their service member is not only a devastating loss of their loved one – it can often also seem like the loss of an identity, of a community, of an entire way of life.

After the death of a service member, somehow, the world continues to turn – but for the family members of the fallen service member, the loss of their loved one is an ever-present reality that can shape their daily life. And although the grieving and healing process is a personal one for each family member,

many Gold Star Families have found comfort in leaning on their communities – both those who have also lost a service member, as well as the greater military community.

## **Gold Star Family Members Find Comfort in Community**

Although others may be able to sympathize with the loss of a loved one, only other Gold Star Families can truly understand the shock and pain that comes with losing a loved one while they served in the military. That's why it's so important for Gold Star Families to find comfort and strength from each other.

For Susannah Preacher, who was only 18 years-old at the time of her brother Sgt. Matthew Preacher's death in 2009, having a community of Gold Star Families to lean on was crucial – especially during the holidays, when his presence was especially missed.

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“To know what I have been through, it helps me because I know others have been through it,” Preacher said. “I can go enjoy myself with other people and not worry about my brother’s death for just a moment.”

When Gold Star Wife Katie Van Aalst’s husband, Master Sgt. Jared Van Aalst, a special operations soldier, was killed in Afghanistan in 2010, she found comfort in community. For Van Aalst, attending events hosted by the Army’s Gold Star Program and Survivor Outreach Services has been crucial to her family’s grieving process, although she was not initially enthusiastic about the prospect.

“In the beginning I didn’t want to attend,” Van Aalst said. “Grief comes in stages.”

Over the years, Van Aalst has participated in more community events and has ensured that her children attend them as well. She knows that these events help her children have a better understanding of the



community they are a part of and the ultimate sacrifice their father made.

“It’s important for them to be around other people who have experienced the same grief and loss,” she said.

In Illinois, Gold Star Family members created a Facebook group to support one another both online and through in-person events.

“We can’t change what happened and we know that,” said Gary Patriquin, a member of the group. “But we can be supportive of each other.”

Even after such a loss, Gold Star Families can find comfort not only in others who have been through the same, terrible experience, but also in the larger military community, which will always count them as one of their own.

## **Gold Star Family Members Continue to Be a Part of the Military Community**

After the loss of a military family member, it may be difficult for Gold Star Families to still feel as if they are a part of the larger military community. After losing so much in the death of their service member, losing access to the military life they've been a part of for so long can be a shock for these Gold Star Families.

For many years, after a service member passed away, the military family would receive support immediately after their death – but over the years, contact with the military community would fade away. More recently, military branches have made concerted efforts to not only stay connected to these families, but to actively support them well after the passing of their loved one.

“It’s important that we keep that relationship with [the families]. No one knows better what they have been through,” said Army Lt. Col. Thomas Hough,

during an event in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 2014 for children who have lost a parent to war. “If not us, then who?”

**Today, Gold Star Families are still welcomed as active members of the military community** itself, not just in base amenities. Many units of the fallen service member work hard to remain close with the family of the service member, and to support them through the grieving process.

Recent congressional action has also worked towards ensuring Gold Star Family members have base access and can still take advantage of benefits such as the commissary or recreation facilities.

**The U.S. military’s outreach efforts to Gold Star Families show that these family members are still very much a part of the larger military community and will continue to be forevermore.**



## CHAPTER 6: HONORING WITH ACTIONS

# Honoring your loved ones

There are many ways to honor loved ones and their inspiration, including remembering them, continuing their traditions, and supporting the causes they care about. Think about what was important to them, and continue on those goals.



# Ways to Honor your loved ones

1. Plant something green in their honor.
2. Embrace something they loved doing
3. Buy a special candle and light it at times that are special to your loved one's memory
4. Write special notes on flying wish paper, light the paper with flame and have a "releasing" gathering to let the messages float away.
5. Create a scrapbook of memories/photos
6. Create a memory quilt or stuffed animal using photos and/or clothing items from your loved one to cuddle up with.

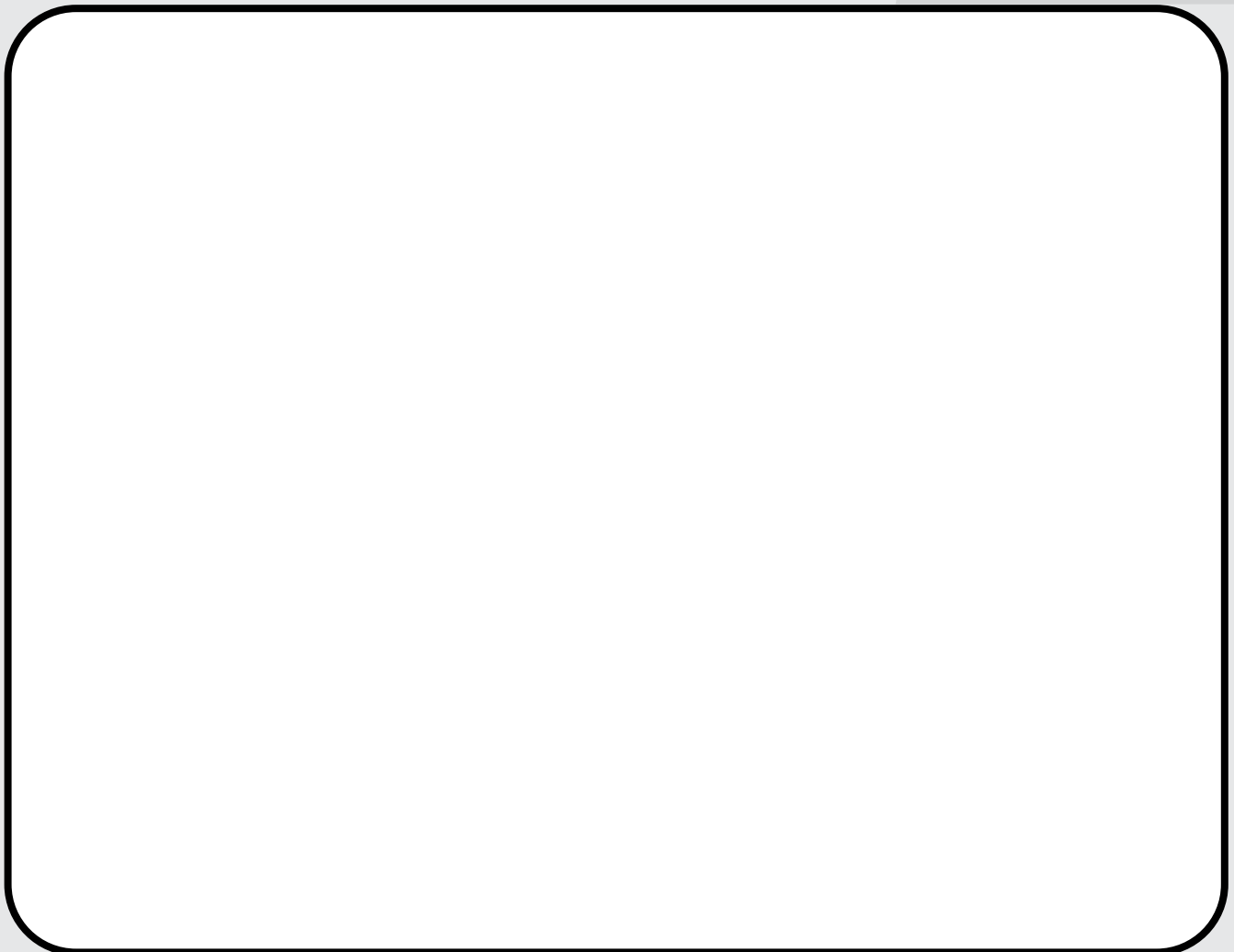






# Activity: Honoring Them

What have you done to bring honor to your loved one, or what will you do?





# CHAPTER 7: CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

# How do you Build Support

Building support involves fostering relationships, being open about your needs, and creating a network of people who can offer assistance and encouragement. To ask for help effectively, start by identifying individuals who are likely to understand and empathize with your situation, such as friends, family, colleagues, or mentors. Communicate your needs clearly and specifically, explaining why you need support and how they can assist you. It's important to express gratitude for any help you receive and to be willing to reciprocate when others need support.

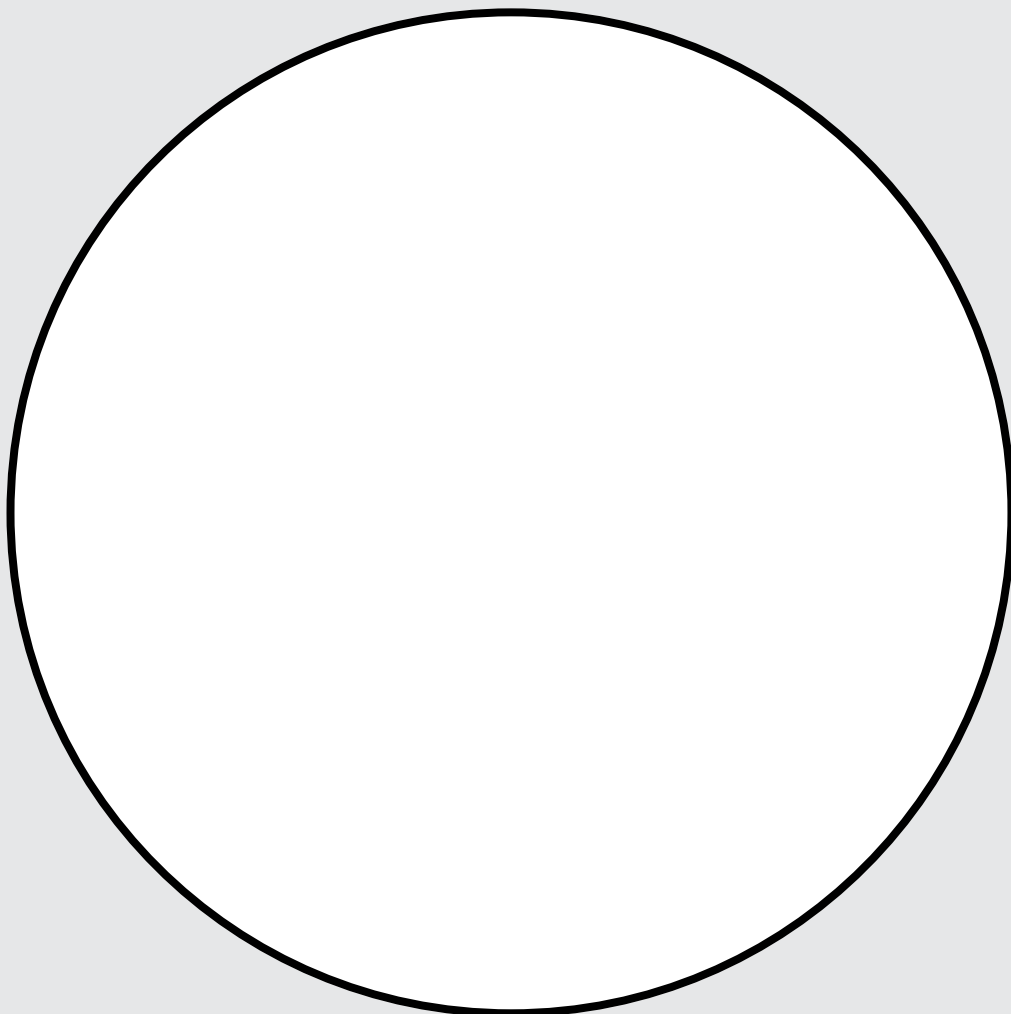
# How do you Build Support

Additionally, participating in community activities, joining interest groups, and attending networking events can expand your support network. Building trust and showing appreciation can strengthen these relationships, creating a reliable support system around you.



# Activity: Supporting

Choose a few people in your life apart from your circle of support and create an image of your circle of support on the page.



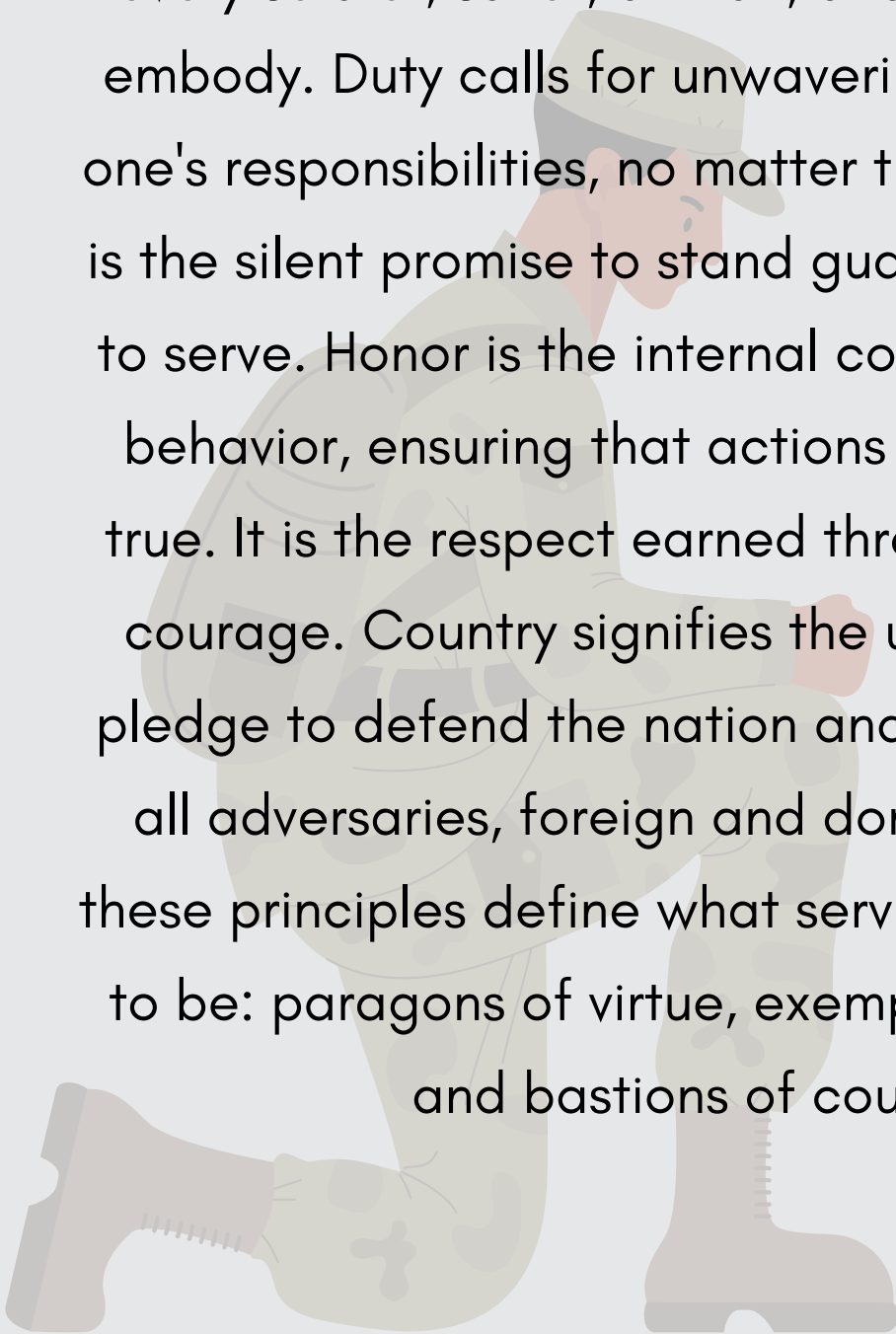


# CHAPTER 8 THE LEGACY: DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY



# What You Ought to Be

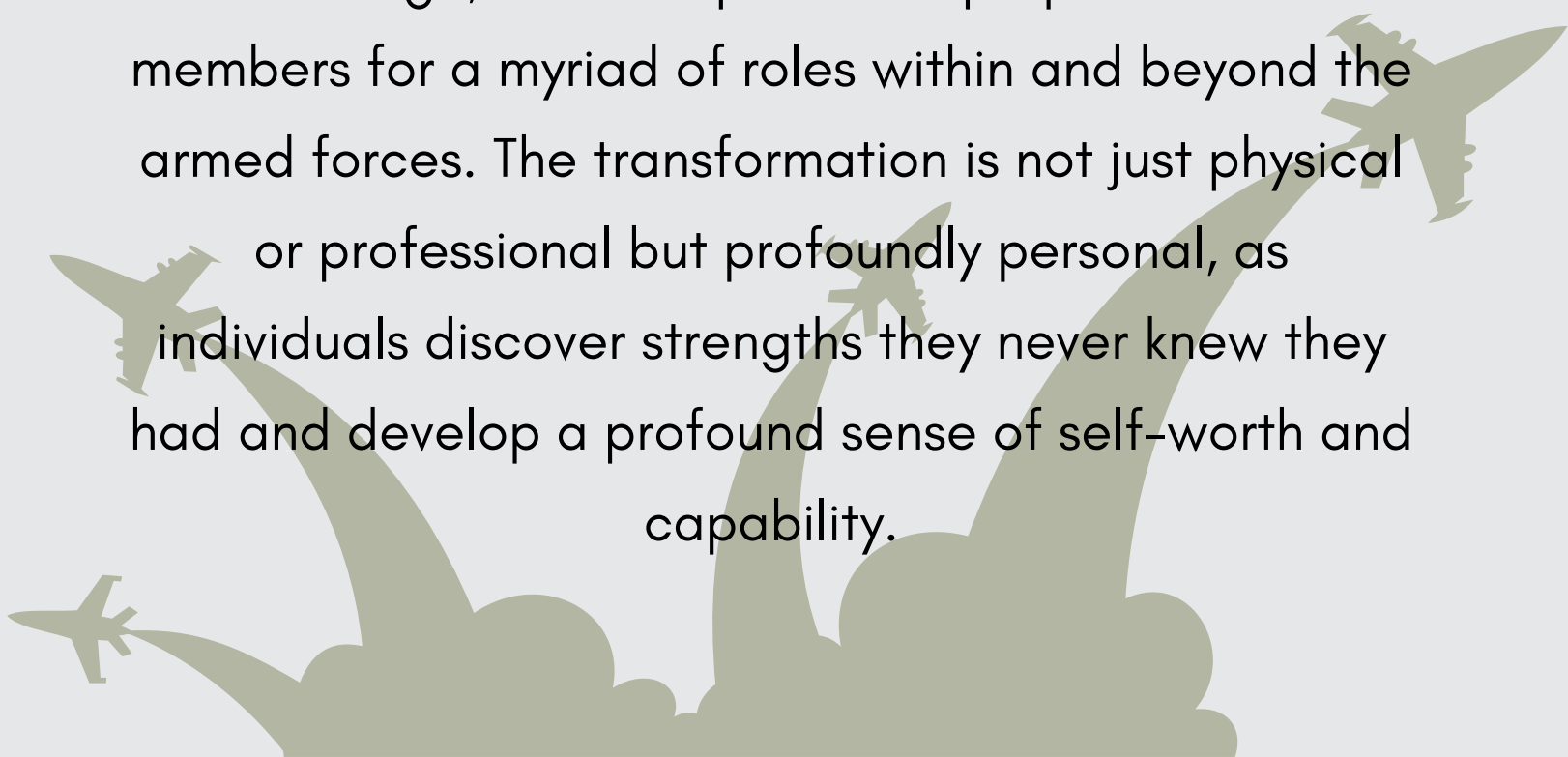
In the hallowed halls of military tradition, the words "Duty, Honor, Country" are more than a motto; they form the bedrock upon which service members build their lives. These words encapsulate the ideals that every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine strives to embody. Duty calls for unwavering commitment to one's responsibilities, no matter the personal cost. It is the silent promise to stand guard, to protect, and to serve. Honor is the internal compass that guides behavior, ensuring that actions are just, fair, and true. It is the respect earned through integrity and courage. Country signifies the ultimate loyalty, a pledge to defend the nation and its values against all adversaries, foreign and domestic. Together, these principles define what service members ought to be: paragons of virtue, exemplars of resilience, and bastions of courage.



# What You Can Be

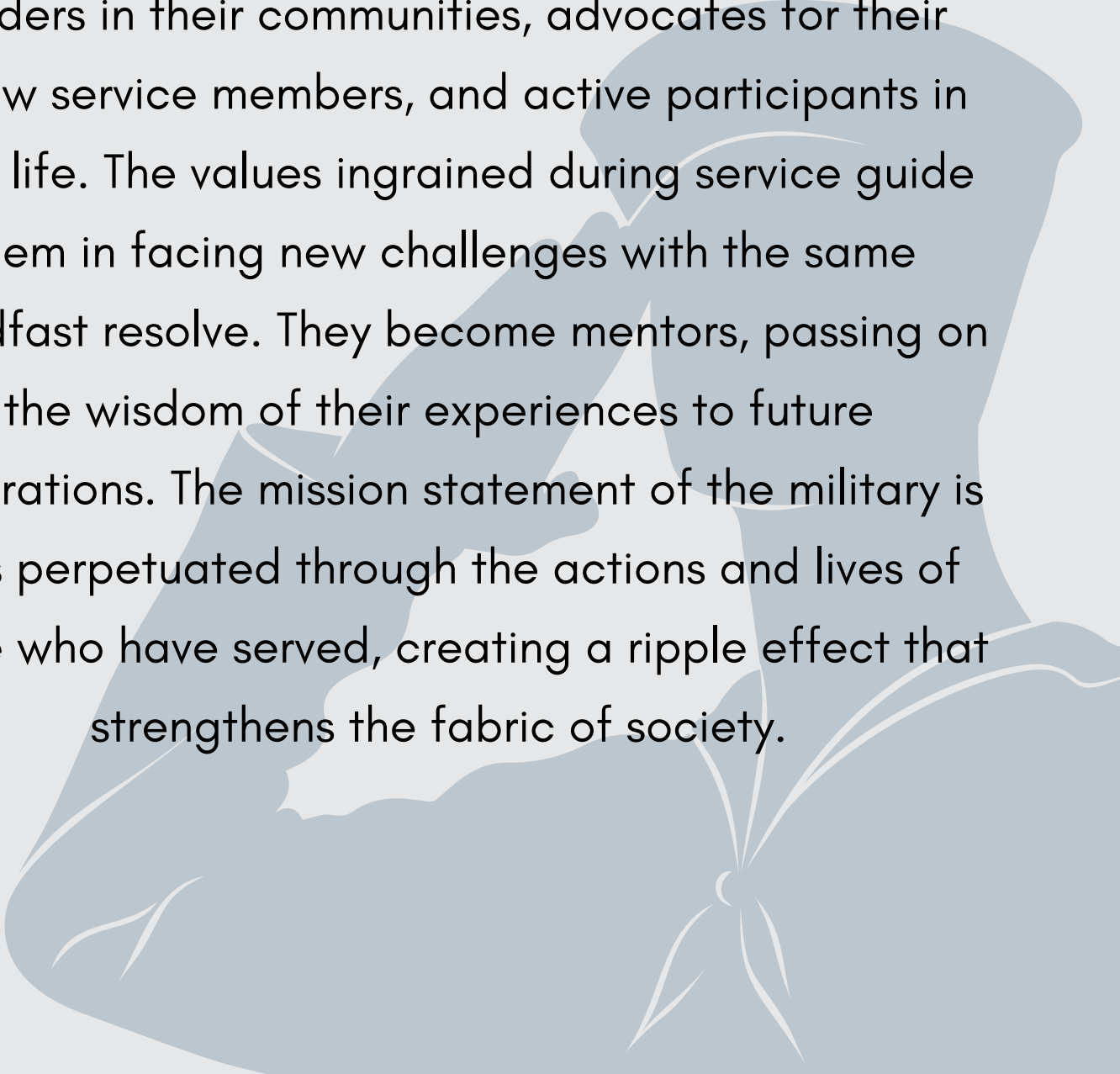
The journey of a service member is one of constant evolution, shaped by experiences both profound and challenging. The potential within each individual is boundless, driven by the ethos of the military and the relentless pursuit of excellence. What you can be is a reflection of the possibilities unlocked by dedication

to Duty, Honor, Country. The military molds individuals into leaders, capable of making decisions under pressure, and instills a sense of purpose that transcends personal ambition. It cultivates skills, knowledge, and discipline that prepare service members for a myriad of roles within and beyond the armed forces. The transformation is not just physical or professional but profoundly personal, as individuals discover strengths they never knew they had and develop a profound sense of self-worth and capability.



# What You Will Be

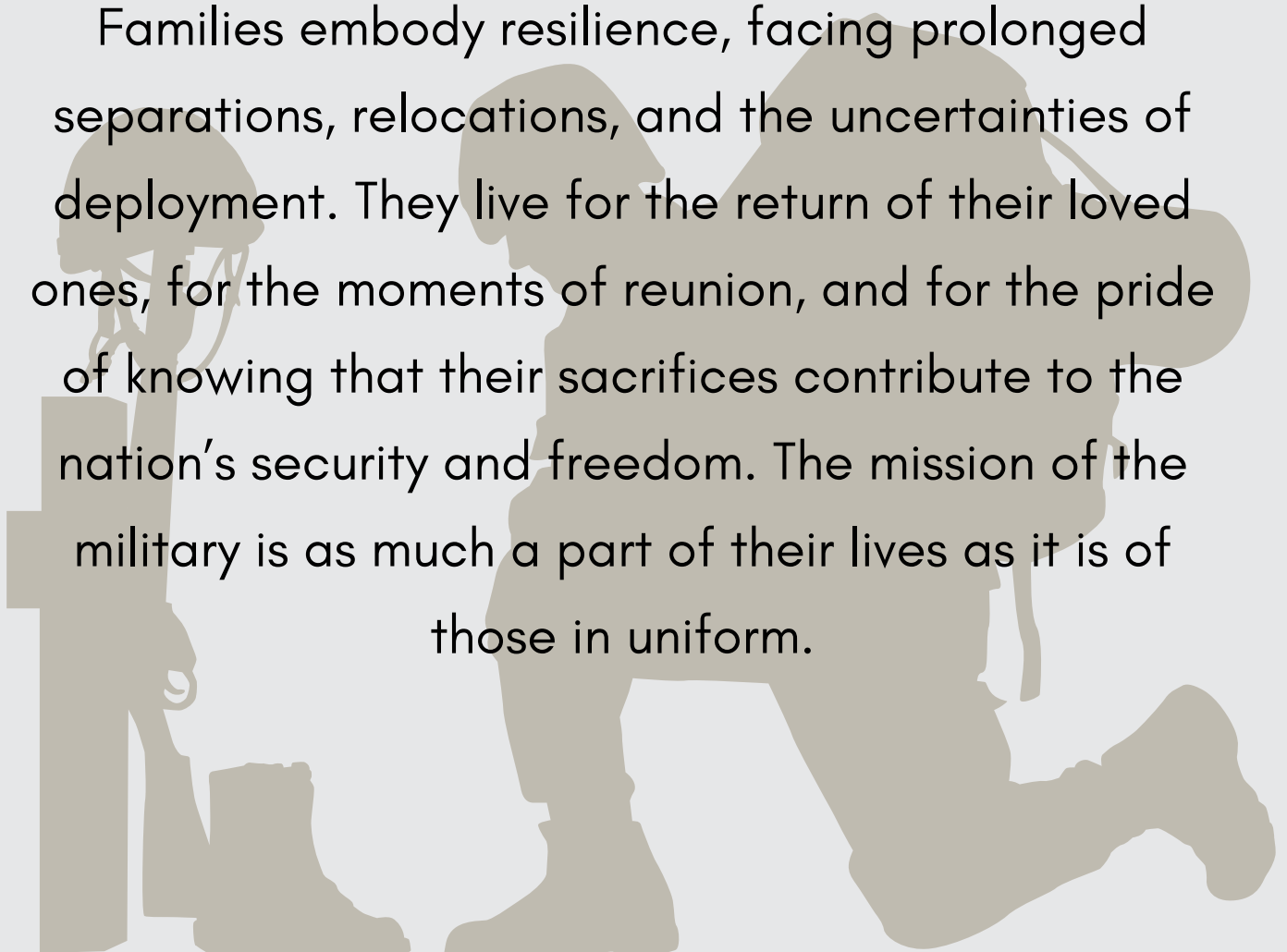
The legacy of service extends far beyond active duty. What you will be is a testament to the enduring impact of the military's mission on personal and communal life. Veterans carry the principles of Duty, Honor, Country into their civilian lives, becoming leaders in their communities, advocates for their fellow service members, and active participants in civic life. The values ingrained during service guide them in facing new challenges with the same steadfast resolve. They become mentors, passing on the wisdom of their experiences to future generations. The mission statement of the military is thus perpetuated through the actions and lives of those who have served, creating a ripple effect that strengthens the fabric of society.



# The Mission & the Loved Ones

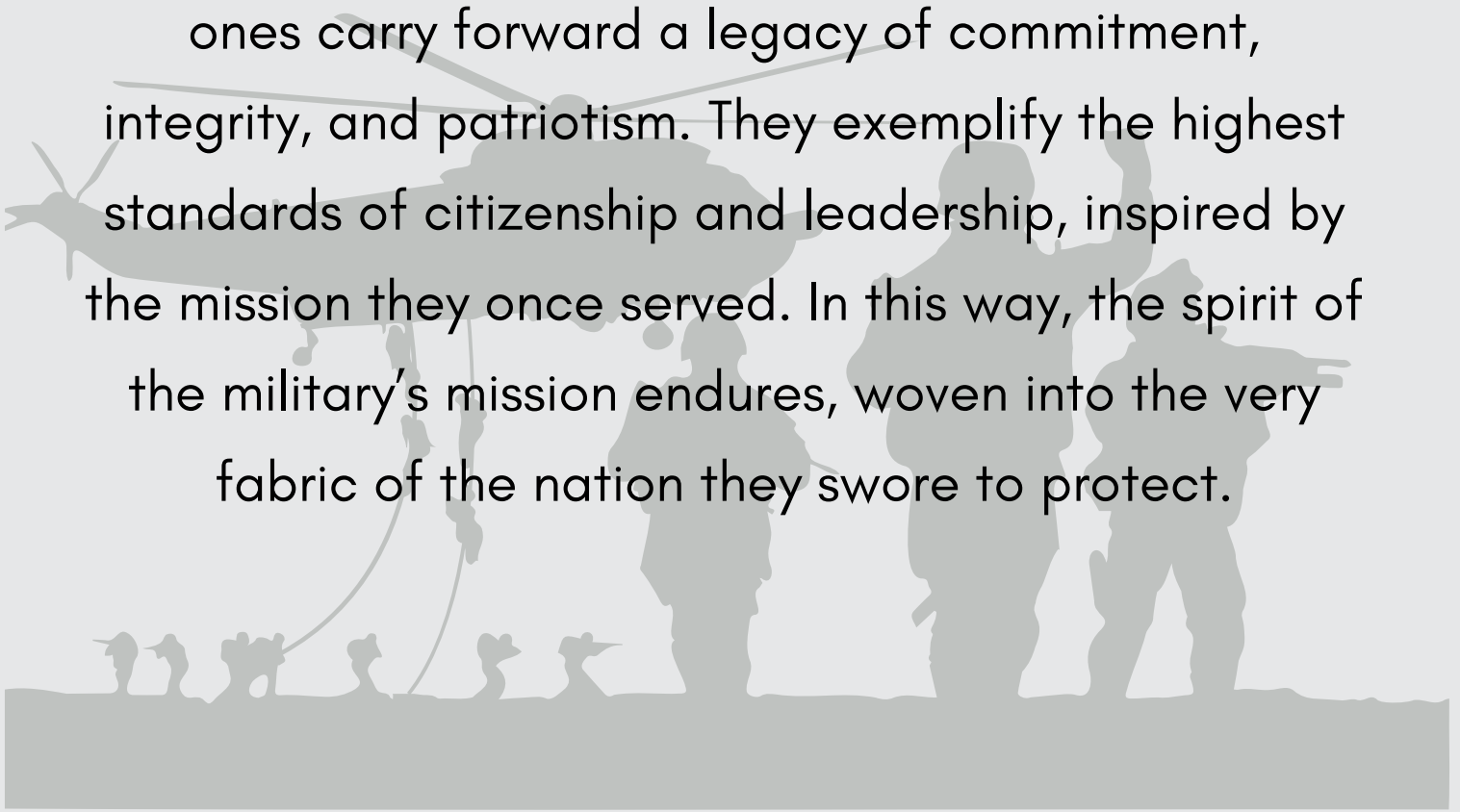
For the loved ones of service members, the mission of the military holds profound significance. They live with the knowledge that their spouse, parent, child, or friend is dedicated to a cause greater than themselves. Their support and sacrifice are integral to the service member's ability to fulfill their duties.

Families embody resilience, facing prolonged separations, relocations, and the uncertainties of deployment. They live for the return of their loved ones, for the moments of reunion, and for the pride of knowing that their sacrifices contribute to the nation's security and freedom. The mission of the military is as much a part of their lives as it is of those in uniform.



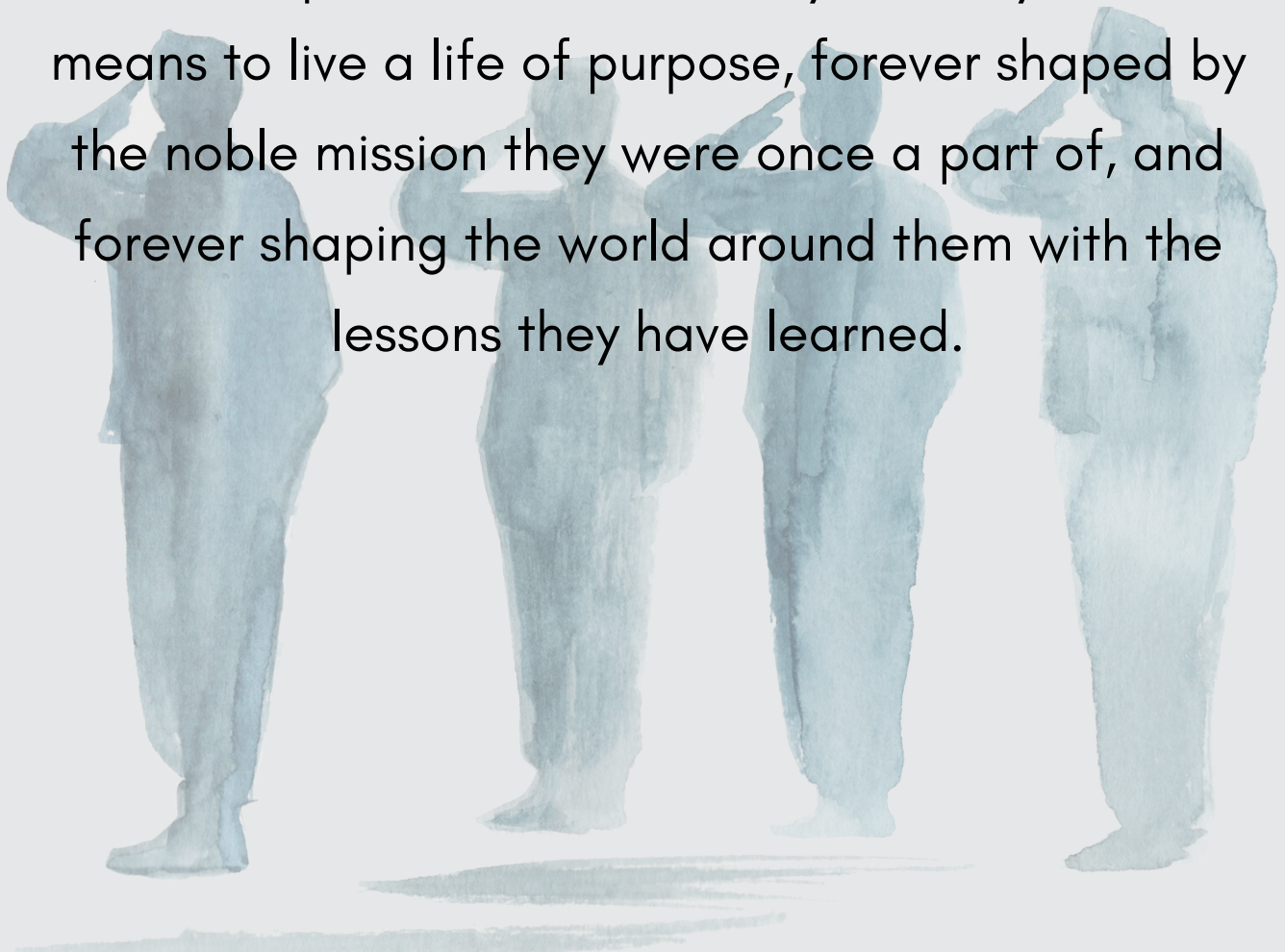
# Carrying the Mission Forward

The principles of Duty, Honor, Country are not confined to the battlefield or the barracks; they are ideals to be carried throughout life. The mission statement of the military continues to influence those who have served and their families long after the uniform is retired. It shapes how they engage with their communities, approach their careers, and raise their families. Service members and their loved ones carry forward a legacy of commitment, integrity, and patriotism. They exemplify the highest standards of citizenship and leadership, inspired by the mission they once served. In this way, the spirit of the military's mission endures, woven into the very fabric of the nation they swore to protect.



# Carrying the Mission Forward

As they move through life, those who have embraced the call of Duty, Honor, Country leave behind a trail of influence, inspiring others to strive for these same ideals. Their legacy is one of service, sacrifice, and unwavering dedication to the principles that define the true spirit of a warrior. They embody what it means to live a life of purpose, forever shaped by the noble mission they were once a part of, and forever shaping the world around them with the lessons they have learned.





# The 98 Fund

The mission of The 98 Fund is to serve, connect, and provide healing support for veterans, survivors, and veteran organizations. Join us as we work to build a bright future while honoring the past.



Any donations amount is  
welcome and none is too  
small