

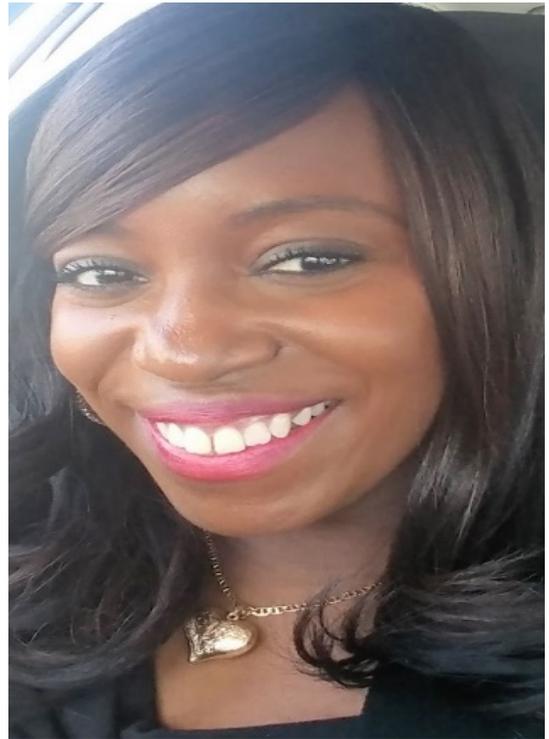
BIO:

Tanya Lynn Wilson-Thomas

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Tanya Lynn Wilson-Thomas, military family advocate, was the Caregiver and is the Gold Star surviving spouse of her late husband, Dwight A. Thomas, Sr., (United States Marine Corps). Tanya and Dwight were both reared, met, grew up and fell in love in Hempstead, on Long Island, New York where both families lived. Right out of high school, Dwight decided to join the Marine Corps. The two childhood sweethearts were soon married and had two children. Tanya's journey to military family advocacy began when her husband, Dwight and his unit, stationed at Cherry Point Naval Air Station, were on emergency standby to deploy to the Persian Gulf. As he awaited orders to deploy, Dwight Sr. collapsed with a brain stem hemorrhage. He underwent several hours of brain surgery. Tanya, still with their 2 children to care for, was immediately introduced to the world of Military Caregiving. Dwight survived surgery, was later placed on the temporary disabled retired list and eventually, medically retired out of the U.S. Marine Corps. He was subsequently service-connected for his various medical conditions. He became severely depressed and at any given time had several serious medical emergencies. At that time, there was no such thing as comprehensive military caregiver support. The Thomas family trekked through the rigors of their "new normal". Eventually, with faith, family, city resources and specialized mental & physical care within the Virginia Beach, VA Healthcare system, things began to improve. With Tanya's support and that of both of their families, Dwight, Sr. began to heal emotionally and physically.

Dwight had overcome many odds but in November of 1998, he succumbed to his various health conditions and passed away at home. Tanya and her children were devastated once again. She again relied heavily on faith, family, and her inner determination to thrive and cultivate resilience within herself and her children.

After a long period of paralyzing grief, Tanya eventually used her military Chapter 35 education benefits to continue her education at Norfolk State University in Virginia, and found a home with the NSU Veterans Club. There she obtained VA work study, working at the Veterans Office on campus. She became a badge holding, VA Hospital Volunteer at Hampton VA, the NSU Veterans' Club Program & Activities Chairperson and later, the NSU Veterans Club President. Tanya introduced NSU student

veterans and other NSU students to community service hours for organizations such as the Hampton Veterans Hospital, The Fisher House, and VETS HOUSE- a home for recovering & transitioning Veterans in Virginia Beach, VA. She then went on to perform VA workstudy at Norfolk Vet Center, assisting the VA Readjustment Counselor, Psychologist and other staff there. Her work-study supervisor was Navy Veteran, Lou Gunn. He and his wife, Mona, lost their son in 2000, on the USS Cole in Yemen. There Tanya learned on an even more profound level about the trauma and grief that is sometimes associated with military service. Additionally, she began spending valuable time learning about the accompanying VA compensation available to Veterans, Surviving Spouses and Children as she sat under the tutelage of the Virginia State Veterans Benefits Advisers who weekly came to the Norfolk Vet Center.

A Gold Star Surviving Spouse herself, it was important for Tanya to support families of deceased Veterans, so she began volunteering for Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, by becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor. In this role she provides one on one mentorship for Military Survivors. Currently she is also TAPS National Illness Care Group Co-Facilitator, who enjoys helping to create a safe space for military families to share about their military loved ones who have passed on due to illness.

Tanya relocated back to NYC in 2010 at a time when her family was experiencing crisis. She became legal guardian to her deceased aunt's two teenagers, getting them out of high school and into college. In NY, Tanya immediately obtained her VA Voluntary Services Badge at St. Albans Community Living Center VA in Queens, NY and resumed her volunteerism within the NYC VA Harbor Healthcare system. Tanya attended The Grace Institute, a free workforce training program in NYC for women, while bringing awareness to the need for transitional support for military families in NYC. Through Grace Institute's partnership with the Arch Diocese of New York's Catholic Charities Community Services, she obtained employment as an Eviction Prevention Case Manager. Eventually Tanya became Senior Eviction Prevention Home Base Case Manager Consultant to the NYC Department of Homeless Services.

Tanya is committed to helping bring military Veteran, Family & Survivor advocacy and support to the forefront of NYC and the nation's awareness.

Tanya is currently employed as Senior Veteran Outreach Specialist and she is the senior accredited Veterans VA Benefits Accredited Personnel at the New York City Department of Veterans' Services. In this role, she is responsible for connecting Veterans and their Families to VA Benefits, various community based, city, state and national resources. Tanya lives in Southeast Queens, NY, where she proudly serves as New York City Chapter Vice President for Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. This organization was founded in 1945 by WWII military widows who lost their husbands in that war. The organization is recognizing 80 yrs. this year and has recommitted themselves to creating awareness, supporting Survivors and Children and changing legislation that speaks directly to the needs of these families who have already sacrificed so much on behalf of the country.

Tanya currently serves as Chaplain with her American Legion Auxiliary at Rosedale-Laurelton American Legion Post 483 under the leadership of Commander Maj. Sharon Sweeting-Lindsey.

She was recently appointed Vice Chair of the Board of Directors at her family's 35 year old non profit organization, called the David & Dovetta Wilson Scholarship Fund. This organization annually offers scholarships to 9 rising, college-bound, high school seniors. These DDWSF Scholar Cohorts, are thoroughly engaged with, followed and supported in various ways for all of their four years of college. Tanya enjoys fellowship with her church and family. Tanya is the proud Blue Star Mother of her & Dwight, Sr.'s son, USAF Technical Sergeant, Dwight A. Thomas, Jr., who will soon reach his USAF 20 year mark with his wife and daughter. She is equally proud of her and Dwight, Sr.'s daughter, Shanice L. Whittaker, a Vice President at Citi, living in Baldwin with her husband, and their two daughters.

Tanya is wholeheartedly grateful to our nation's service members and their families. She remains honored to serve the military community of all eras. Tanya declares that she will remain deeply