

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd



Dear Compassionate Friends:

Have you ever had to deal with what I call the "competitive" griever? That is the term I use to describe someone who feels her grief must be greater than yours for a variety of reasons. Maybe she has voiced that because your child died after a long illness you must have been expecting his death and been ready for it; whereas her child died unexpectedly and her grief came suddenly and unexpectedly.

Maybe she feels you grieve less than she does because your child died before or shortly after birth, and because you never really "knew" your child her grief is greater than yours. Perhaps her child that died was her only child, and "you still have your other children", so you can't possibly feel as much pain as she does.

This "competitive griever" may go on at length how she just couldn't eat and lost 30 pounds, or she just couldn't go back to work her grief was so great. You may start to wonder why you were able to function enough to take care of your family or continue to go to work. Is she right? Is she making you feel inadequate that you are trying to survive and trying to stay strong for your family and those who need you? What she doesn't know is that you go through two pads of "sticky" notes every day to keep track of everything you need to remember. She doesn't know that you cry in the car both coming and going to work so that you can keep it together while you're at work.

This "competitive griever" usually doesn't want to listen to you or hear about your child, because....well, she is being competitive.

I have no magic words to give you in response to people like this. When I have been in this situation I have been so taken aback words fail me, because I don't understand what their motive is. Are they trying to make themselves feel better by making you feel worse? Is there a prize somewhere for "best griever"?

One of the best lessons I have learned in all my years with Compassionate Friends is that no one knows exactly how you feel. You may have lost your child at exactly the same age and under exactly the same circumstances as another person, but everyone grieves differently and handles it differently. All of us who have lost a child know how it differs from losing anyone else, and have many of the same thoughts and feelings as another bereaved parent, but our relationships with our children may differ. Perhaps our child was not making good choices at the time of their death. Perhaps our child was in so much physical or emotional pain they chose to end their life. Some of us had children who were going to have long-term health problems-there is a kind of grieving in that alone. Parents with children with long-term health problems grieve for the life and health their children should have had and were denied. We grieve for all the hospitalizations, medical procedures and pain our child goes through, and-guess what, lady? Even if I had been told my child was going to die-I still would not have been "prepared" for it! Even if you were told there was no longer any hope and had to make the decision to remove the ventilator or whatever was keeping your child's body alive I still don't think you are "prepared".

It is our nature as loving parents that we will hold out on hope that our child will not die, even when we are told all hope is gone. As loving parents we will fight any fight or make any sacrifice necessary to keep our children safe, including giving our own lives, without hesitation. Such is the power and strength of love.

Now, going back to the "competitive griever". Now that I'm further down the path of healing and (maybe) a little wiser I guess I would say as kindly as possible that I was sorry to hear about her child and that we all deal with grief in different ways. No, it would not be kind to use Dr. Phil's line "How's that working for you?"! I would encourage her to attend some Compassionate Friend meetings, check out the website, check out and read books from our library and journal her thoughts and feelings. This may be her way of coping and surviving her grief. She is very likely feeling inadequate and seeking to voice her pain. Sharing and trying to reach out to others suffering this pain leads to healing and understanding. There is no prize for "Best Griever" or even ribbons for participating, but you may win comfort, healing, serenity and peace for your broken heart.

In friendship,

Nadine