

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd



Dear Compassionate Friends:

A friend at work recently went through a tragic loss with her cousin, whose 3 year old son died from cancer. He was only diagnosed in early April of this year, and he and his family suffered through bone marrow biopsies, bone marrow transplants, chemotherapy and radiation. His family lived several hours away from the hospital and had to rely on family and friends to care for their other children, try to keep up with work and traveling back and forth.

Even though it has been so many years, this brought back so many memories of our own experience. Aaron and I were far away from our family for months at a time. My husband was trying to work, keep up with meals, housekeeping, laundry, paying bills AND caring for our young son, who was only a year old at the time.

It is indescribable going through these kind of medical treatments with your child, especially a very young child. They are too young to understand the necessity of the tests or treatments. They know only being stuck in a strange place where people stick needles in you or give you disgusting things to drink or feeling great pain. A parent would gladly take on this suffering so their child does not have to.

We had some wonderful doctors, nurses and other staff who were so very kind to us, but both of us were scared and homesick and thoroughly tired of being in the hospital. I did my best to help Aaron get through the experience. When he got tired of hospital food I would walk 10 blocks one way to Arby's to get him an "Uncle Alligator" meal. We got lost on the campus of the University of Minnesota one afternoon (it is huge) after going to McDonald's and barely made it back in time for another scheduled test. But Aaron was happy. He was enjoying the ride, he got out of the hospital on a beautiful fall day and he got his Happy Meal. Sometimes I would get his IV pole rolling and we would take the little red wagon down to the Mississippi River next to the hospital and watch the riverboats going by and the rabbits that lived near the river. He loved playing the arcade game in the playroom, even though he was so little I had to pull up a chair for him to stand on to play.

One of our wonderful nurses bought Aaron a Batman sweatshirt, and it was his pride and joy. He loved the old Batman series on TV (Zowie, Batman!) We had come to Minnesota in only summer clothes, and the nurses very kindly brought us some sweatshirts when the weather turned. They actually did our laundry, as well, as there were no laundry facilities for patients at the hospital. I will never forget the wonderful staff who became our family when we were there so long.

My friend at work felt so bad she was not able to travel for the memorial service, and I assured her that the time you really need help and feel so alone is after the service is over and everyone leaves to go back to their life. Our entire family's life revolved around how Aaron was feeling for so long, and after he left for Heaven I felt like I no longer knew who I was or what my role was in life. I didn't understand how the sun still came up in the morning, how people could still laugh and the world went on, because our world had certainly ended. I didn't know how I kept breathing, because my heart had been ripped out. People are so kind and helpful, but gradually drift back to their own busy lives.

Senator John Tester is currently sponsoring a bill called the Parental Bereavement Act (S. 1358), which would expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to provide job-protected leave due to the death of an employee's son or daughter. Senator Tester is quoted as saying "the last thing parents should be worrying about is whether they'll lose their jobs as they deal with life-changing loss." Thank you, Senator Tester. You really do get it-that losing a child is different than any other kind of grief. You are not back to "normal" in two weeks, and it is incredibly difficult to adjust to the "new" normal.

I told my friend to tell her cousin that Aaron was there to greet her son in Heaven, and was probably pretty excited to have another little boy to play "Space Invaders" with. My heart goes out to those parents, who are just beginning their journey of grief and healing. Even as I write this, the tears are so close, and the memories so vivid. Our hearts do go on. They are broken, beat-up, mended, no longer whole; but they continue to beat and continue to love. Our children taught us unconditional, never-ending love and continue to give us strength, hope and healing until we can be together again.

I wish you the healing beauty of your child's love and the strength of its hope and healing. Love has no boundaries. It is timeless, unchanging and never-ending.

Happy Birthday, Aaron! We love you always and forever!

In friendship,

Nadine