

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd



Dear Compassionate Friends:

We will have a few milestone birthdays in our family this year, and I've been thinking a lot about life lessons. I remember how idealistic I was, how much energy and passion I used to have and the strong sense of fairness I had. I still struggle with the fairness issue, because for most of my life I felt if you worked hard, trusted God, loved and took care of your family, tried to make your community a better place and shared what you have with those less fortunate you would be rewarded with a happy, loving family, comfortable financial lifestyle and fulfilling life. I naively believed that bad things happened to other people. Of course, now I know differently. Life doesn't offer any guarantees and bad things do happen to good people, even when they are doing their best and making good choices. Loss of loved ones, illness, loss of faith, or loss of your job or marriage can happen to anyone. It took a long time to realize that we are not being punished when we face these hardships-life happens.

Lessons I've learned on this journey of grief:

1. Grief has no timetable. You don't "get over it" in a week or two, and trying to hurry it along only makes things worse.
2. Grieving the loss of a child is totally different than any other kind of grief. Regardless of the circumstances of your child's death you blame yourself or feel you could have prevented it somehow.
3. You have to grieve however works best for you. If you need to go to your child's gravesite every day, do it. If you need to journal your feelings to get through the pain, do it. If you need prescription medication or professional counseling to help with your pain and depression, do it.
4. It's very difficult to grieve alone. Someone wise once said "grief shared is grief halved, but joy shared is doubled". Try two or three Compassionate Friends meetings. It's hard to take the first step to get there, but there is no one who understands better than someone who has "been there, done that". Sometimes the topic of the meeting may not seem helpful to you, but the sharing and understanding is so helpful. I've heard so many Friends say it was hard to get to the first meeting, but they soon wished Compassionate Friends met more often.
5. Stifling or hiding your grief only makes the pain worse. There are no prizes for "toughest" griever or "best stiff upper lip".
6. Grieving takes tremendous energy, both physical and emotional. Grieving affects your physical health, as well as your emotional health. Grief affects your digestion, metabolism, sleep patterns and immune system.
7. People are anxious for you to get back to normal. They don't understand you will never be "normal" as they knew you ever again. You have a "new" normal now, and it very likely will change from day to day. You may lose friends who don't understand what you are going through and just can't deal with your pain, but you will keep your true friends and may gain new friends. Friends who understand you, accept you and won't desert you when the going is rough. Recently I apologized to two long-time friends whom I haven't been in contact with as I should, and they assured me they still love me and "I'm stuck with them for life".
8. Grieving families become unwilling educators. People don't mean to say ignorant or unkind comments, but they can and do. How you handle this is a whole column in itself, depending on where you are at in your grief. Sometimes a gentle response like "I'm sure you didn't mean how that sounded" works well. Not acknowledging my grief or never talking about my child hurt much more than risking an ignorant comment. People ask how many children I have and I say three. Inevitably they go on to ask ages, where they live, etc. When I say my oldest son lives in Heaven there is almost always an awkward pause in the conversation, but I cannot not acknowledge Aaron's life and his importance as my son as well as my other children. I figure that's their problem in handling this information-they did ask, after all.
9. You will very likely be placed in a position to help other hurting bereaved parents, and in turn help yourself. It does seem that God sometimes steers us toward each other. I cannot tell you how many times I have been in a casual conversation with a total stranger at work, in an airport, or other unlikely place to find out they were a bereaved parent as well, and seeking help to get through their pain.
10. You will find joy again. It comes slowly at first-more of a lessening of the pain, then more good days than bad days, and then one day you will find yourself smiling and looking forward with hope to the future. Your heart will heal and you are stronger than you think.

Keep the faith, do your best to keep moving and trust that things will get better. Remember the old song "I get by with a little help from my Friends."

In friendship,

Nadine