

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd



Dear Compassionate Friends:

Grieving the loss of your child or sibling can be so lonely and isolating. It almost feels as though people think your loss is “infectious”, and if they are in contact with you it could happen to them too. I’m sure it is such a shock to other parents and they do feel that if it happened to us it could happen to them as well. Other times people are just so uncomfortable and feel so helpless they would rather avoid you altogether. They don’t want to “remind” you or “make you cry”. Guess what? We think about our child constantly and cry nearly as much, at least at first. This brings even greater pain to the bereaved. We sometimes end up comforting them when they confess they don’t know how to help! I try not to be too angry, because I may have done the same thing before we lost our son. It just takes so much energy sometimes to educate others.

I’ve actually had people see me at the grocery store and duck into another aisle, because they wanted to avoid me. This hurt so much, especially because the woman had a son Aaron’s age at the same daycare. If she didn’t know what to say a simple hug or “I’m so sorry” would have meant a lot. Even a short note from her with a little memory of Aaron and saying the kids would miss him would have been very comforting.

It was also not helpful to have people tell me how brave I was-that if it happened to them they just wouldn’t be able to survive. I wondered if they were trying to tell me they loved their child more than I did. I wasn’t brave at all. I was hanging on by sheer will, because I had another little boy who needed his mom here on earth.

One of the most healing, comforting things happened unexpectedly to me shortly after Aaron’s death. The director of his daycare had called me to please come and clean out his cubby and take his belongings and nametag. I was so dreading it, because it was another reminder of the finality and reality of his death. I put it off as long as I could, but after several calls I went into the daycare, heavy-hearted and filled with pain.

A beautiful little girl named Betsy, about 3 or 4, a year or so younger than Aaron came running up to me and point blank asked me “Is Aaron an angel now?” Her mother was right behind her and was just cringing and apologizing for her daughter. I told Betsy “Yes, Aaron went to Heaven and he is an angel now”. She looked pleased and excited that she personally knew an angel now, and I told her mom not to apologize-it made me feel good she asked about Aaron. I often wish that more adults had that openness and ability to so directly approach a hurting person.

Remember in last month’s column I wrote about how often we are placed in a situation where we end up comforting another bereaved parent? We end up comforting that parent and in doing so we begin to heal ourselves. There is no one more understanding than someone else who either has already been down or is walking along the path to healing from the loss of a child. Another bereaved parent is not going to “duck” you. That parent is not going to be afraid to make you cry or “remind” you of your loss. That parent wants to tell you about their child and wants to hear stories about your child. That parent wants to know how you do it-how you get through the endless days and nights of darkness and despair. That parent wants to know if their thoughts and feelings are normal or if their grief has made them crazy. That parent wants to know how to talk to their spouse and their surviving children. That parent wants to know if it will always hurt this badly, or if it is okay to laugh and feel hope someday.

I have received several notes and heard from other bereaved parents that sometimes they have received great comfort from this column-that a particular topic had a lot of meaning to them. Your feedback is so appreciated! Writing this column and sharing my thoughts has been very healing to me, and it is so important to me that I am able to share my stories and love for Aaron like I do with my other sons. Hearing that others receive comfort from this column is very special, and I feel it honors Aaron’s life. It also gives me an opportunity to “pay it forward”. My Compassionate Friends have been so helpful to me all these years and I have learned so much from you.

I wish you comfort and healing in the sharing of your love for your children, and I feel honored that you allow me to share all our feelings, good or bad. May we learn from each other, help each other and be Friends like no others. We need not walk alone on this journey to healing.

In friendship,

Nadine