

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Grief is a very odd condition, as we all know. It can cause true physical pain, as well as memory loss, digestive and metabolic changes, changes in our sleep patterns-the list goes on and on. Suffering from a broken heart is not just a song lyric. I've mentioned that one of our Compassionate Friends used to say that her heart felt so broken she often caught herself looking down. She just knew that there must be a gaping hole where her heart used to be.

Studies have shown the composition of our tears we cry in our grief is even different from regular old tears. I think our bodies are under so much stress from grief they are in "siege" mode, almost like fighting off a serious illness.

The good news is that this "siege" mode does not last forever. The bad news is that it can come back without warning, even years into your healing. I call it that "punched in the gut" feeling when you almost literally feel you can't breathe. A memory, an anniversary date, even seeing or hearing something your child loved can trigger it.

The "phases" of grief (denial, anger, acceptance) have been well documented; however, no one tells you that you are never really "over" each phase. You can sometimes go in and out of each phase. It has been over twenty years since Aaron went to Heaven and I still have times when I am angry that he died. I will NEVER accept the so-called "acceptance" phase. I really hate that term, but I guess "they didn't give me a choice and I can't change it" was too long.

It often seems that each new chapter of my life causes me to go through a version of the grieving process again. Our surviving children are back in college and on their own now; and we are no longer the parents of young children, but are "empty nesters". There is a grieving process of that chapter of our life ended. Each new change in your life brings some loss of the old life and you grieve.

What can you do to get through these times? Does anything help?

Lower your expectations. Giving yourself just one task is not so overwhelming. Focus on breathing slowly and deeply. Stress and being overwhelmed can give us panic attacks, and we tend to "pant", not giving our bodies enough oxygen. Deep, slow breathing also calms you and helps you focus on the task at hand. Remember deep breathing in labor? Same theory.

Try to eat healthy, nutritious foods. Stay well hydrated. Exercise to release some of that negative energy.

Accept that sometimes you are going to feel bad. Emotions are your emotions-good and bad. You have a right to feel however you feel-angry, sad, bitter. How you deal with your emotions is the key-find out what works for you. Talk to a Friend, journal your feelings, talk to your child-do whatever helps.

Don't allow anyone to put you on a "time-line" for your grief. We all grieve differently and at our own pace. Be a little selfish if others are trying to make you feel guilty that you "still" go to the cemetery, you "still" go to "those" meetings or you "still" haven't changed his room and given his belongings away. You will know when it is time to move on.

Check out one or more of our books from our Compassionate Friends library. It can be very helpful understanding others' grief and learning what helped them on their journey to recovery. We have some books by wonderful authors who will make you laugh when you read about their experiences (yes, you are allowed to laugh!)

Cry if you need to. Find a safe place to cry (or scream) if you need to. I know we have all done it, but crying while driving probably is NOT a good idea. Pull over and let those emotions out!

Write yourself reminders for important deadlines or tasks. Sticky notes were my lifesaver at work, because my memory and concentration were so bad I could not stay focused for more than one paragraph or thought. Surround yourself with loving, supportive people. Grieving people have enough negative energy going on without adding to it. I have found some people thrive on chaos and drama, and it is very energy draining to have them around. It always has to be about them. Usually they don't want to have their problems solved, because that would take away the attention and drama. Right now you need to take care of you.

Seek professional help from a doctor, therapist or spiritual counselor if nothing is helping. Recovering from grief is no different than recovering from a major surgery or heart attack. Help is there if you need it. Consider yourself in "physical therapy". Take it in small steps.

Healing from grief is a long journey, and sometimes it is a "one step forward, two steps back" process. Give yourself permission to grieve and feel those feelings. Understand you are not crazy-you are grieving. Talk to another Compassionate Friend. Come to the monthly support group. Read the newsletter. Honor your child at one of the memorial services. I promise you that no one understands your pain like someone who has been there.

We need not walk alone. We are the Compassionate Friends.

In friendship,

Nadine

