

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd



Dear Compassionate Friends:

Life is not fair. This is a lesson I have struggled to learn my whole life. I think we all try to be good people; kind to others, share what we have with those who struggle, be a loving spouse, parent, son or daughter and sibling, a trusted employee, and a good citizen. Somehow we think we should be rewarded in life and not be subject to pain. Why DO bad things happen to good people? Loss of our children, divorce, loss of work, illness, loss of material possessions in a natural or unnatural disaster shouldn't happen to "good" people, right? We feel singled out by the universe, somehow. Bereaved parents and siblings know this all too well. It is not the natural order of the circle of life to bury your child or young brother or sister.

A popular song advises "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger". I've never felt much comfort from this. It makes me want to throw myself on the ground and wail "I don't want to be stronger! I want things back the way they were!" Well, it appears we don't get a choice about some things in life.

We have shared things of the well-meaning but hurtful things people have said to us when our child died. One that drove me crazy was "You are so strong! I would just die if something happened to my child!" Well, I was not strong. I was not brave. I wanted to curl up in a dark place and die myself so I could go to Heaven with Aaron. But I couldn't. I could not leave my other little son, who was only a baby at the time. I couldn't leave my husband alone to struggle in his pain. I was literally caught between Heaven and Earth. I had to choose to go on for the sake of my family. I knew Aaron was safe in Heaven with the grandmas, but he belonged here with us. Was he scared? Did he miss us so much too? I was glad he was no longer in pain, but he was taken out of our arms way too soon.

So, back to the well-meaning person who thinks I'm strong. I know they meant it kindly, and were just trying to be comforting. I really don't remember how I responded-maybe just mumbled I didn't have a choice. You go on because you have to; others need you.

I was visiting with a group of women co-workers the other day and we were talking about how becoming a parent is not for those "weak-stomached". When your child is ill there are times you have to clean up some pretty disgusting messes, but you do it because you have to and it's your child. No one else can take care of that mess, and your baby is sick and needs you.

Being a parent is not for the "weak-hearted" either. You feel just as much heartache, or more, than your child when they suffer a disappointment or get their heart broken. This is the other edge of that double-edged sword of the amazing, all-encompassing love you feel for your child. Their pain becomes your pain. My husband says we would "slay dragons" for love of our children.

Are we stronger now, having gone through the worst experience a parent can go through? I don't know about stronger, but maybe we are more aware of what is really important in our lives. We are less likely to "sweat the small stuff". Faith, family and personal values are more important than ever. Material possessions, having a lot of money and your status in the community are not so important.

The wonderful poet Kahlil Gibran said our children come through us, not from us, and I have to believe that our love for our children and their love for us is eternal, no matter the distance or dimension. I believe we will be with our children and other loved ones gone before us someday. We wonder if we are still that child's mom or dad if they now live in Heaven. One of the most difficult questions bereaved parents have to deal with is "how many children do you have?" Your choice is acknowledging ALL your children and then dealing with the awkward silence that usually follows when you share that your child now lives in Heaven, or NOT acknowledging all your children and feeling the guilt that you couldn't deal with the pain of our continuing loss.

This Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day celebrate that you ARE mothers and fathers; that your children are still your children. Celebrate the circle of love. The circle of life may have ended, but the circle of love is forever.

I wish you strength and healing, and comfort in that circle of love.

In friendship,

Nadine