

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd



Dear Compassionate Friends:

At some point along your journey of grief you have to make a conscious choice to heal. Notice I say heal-not "get over" your grief. I don't believe we ever really get over our grief, but time does soften and help to heal the terrible pain of our loss. Timetables differ for each of us, and each of us travels this path differently, but I found just becoming educated about grief and reaching out to other bereaved parents helps tremendously. It helped me so much to hear my thoughts and fears from others who had been there, and gave me strength and encouragement to know that I too could live through this pain. You may be thinking that no one else can possibly be thinking the bizarre thoughts you are-you will be surprised. When I felt strong enough to share an especially weird thought, often others would say "I thought that too!" or several people at the chapter meeting would nod their heads in agreement. We agreed "You're not crazy-you're grieving!"

If you have never attended a Compassionate Friends meeting, you may find it very helpful and healing to meet other bereaved parents or siblings. You do not have to speak if you don't want to, but somehow just seeing others have survived this terrible pain is comforting and encouraging. You will never hear at a Compassionate Friends meeting "you shouldn't feel that way", "are you still going to those meetings" or "you have to get on with your life". You will meet others who want to know you and your child. They want to hear your stories and they will never change the subject or get uncomfortable if you cry. They may cry with you or even laugh with you.

It usually doesn't work to "stuff" our grief. Many of us feel we could have prevented our child's death somehow and beat ourselves up with the "shoulda, woulda, couldas". Many of us wonder how to get through the days and nights, how to face our children's friends and families, and how to get through holidays and special occasions. We feel isolated and very alone in our pain. We wonder why we were singled out-why our child died. It helps so much to know how other bereaved parents got through the bad times-how they handled giving away their child's belongings, handling that dreaded question "how many children do you have?" and celebrating the life and love of their child. We also have the unfortunate duty of educating others about grief-some more willing than others.

Our Compassionate Friends chapter has a number of wonderful books on grief on nearly every topic you can imagine. We have books on losing a baby, losing a child to a terminal illness, suicide, books written by dads, helping a young sibling understand what death is, for example. If you are like me and couldn't focus long enough to retain a paragraph, there is a wonderful book (I believe written by Darcy Sims) with just one important phrase or thought on each page. The books in the library are free to check out and we just ask that you return them to the chapter so that others may share them.

If you are just not up to coming to the group, or group support is not your thing check out the National Compassionate Friends website and it can refer you to a number of chat rooms to share your thoughts with other bereaved parents or siblings. It can also refer you to other support groups specific to your interest, such as Survivors of Suicide. I have found beautiful poetry and stories that echoed my thoughts and feelings so well I wondered how the author got in my head!

This month we honor grandparents. Grandparents have the double burden of grief, in that not only have they lost their beloved grandchild, but also see their own child hurting so badly and are helpless to take away that pain. Grandparents are always welcome to attend any chapter meetings. Their support and input can be so valuable to help a family heal and learn to still be a family, despite the loss of someone so dear.

I wish you the strength to reach out to others to share the pain, the love and the laughter. I wish you the comfort of knowing your Friends care. I wish you the healing that comes with sharing your thoughts, feelings and ideas on how we can walk this path together.

In friendship,

Nadine