

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Grief has certain milestones, along with any other journey in our lives. The most obvious of those milestones are the first few anniversaries of your child or sibling's birthday or date of death, of course. We certainly expect that holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter will also be tough to get through. You might be getting along and coping pretty well, thinking you made it through those big ones, and then something completely unexpected comes along, and you are right back to footstep one.

Maybe this year your child would have gone to kindergarten, or lost his first tooth, or begun talking or walking. Maybe this year your child would have gone to college or attended his first prom. Maybe this year your child or sibling would have gone through Driver's Ed, gotten his first job or bought his first car. Maybe this year you looked forward to carving a pumpkin and buying your child a costume and going trick or treating. Maybe you looked forward to picking out a sparkly dress or dashing tuxedo with your child to go to Prom or Twirp.

Grieving the loss of a child or sibling is so different than losing another loved one, say, a grandparent, because you also mourn the loss of future memories, not just past memories.

In addition to the loss of the future memories mentioned above, my son Aaron died the day after his fifth birthday, and I was so fearful with my other children when they became five that something would happen to them also. Other Friends have shared that their other children often went through tough grieving times when those children reached a new stage of development, and almost had to "re-live" and work through their grief before they could go higher developmentally.

Even my youngest son, who was not even born when Aaron died, went through times when he asked a lot of questions about Aaron, and how much he wished he had known him. My son and I once had a conversation about the never ending love you feel for your children; and how you cannot possibly fathom the depth of that love until you become a parent yourself. It doesn't matter whether your child is two or twelve or fifty two, or now lives in Heaven, your child is still your baby and you wonder and worry and pray that they are safe and happy and healthy.

I guess the best way to get through grief is to be aware that there will be unexpected milestones. Healing from grief is definitely not a time you get through going forward without any setbacks. It is more of a two step forward, one step back process.

You may get through those milestones or setbacks with just a little twinge of the heartstrings, but there may be times you are "kicked in the gut". Even after all these years, I had a "flashback" recently remembering when Aaron used to get up from his nap, holding his "blankie" up to his face, and coming out from his bedroom for some cuddle time. I remembered the smell of his sleepy little boy hair, his sweet smile and the softness of his "blankie." It made me think of how many of those sweet cuddle times we have missed and I was so sad. I guess I was surprised of the power of that memory and the pain of the grief of our loss. It doesn't happen often now that we are much further down the path of healing, but every now and then it does.

It takes time, but time really does help heal the pain. You can live with a hole in your heart. In time the really bad times will be fewer and there will be more time in between. Learning ways to cope and reaching out to others who have "been there, done that" helps a great deal.

I wish you comfort and healing as the milestones come along.

In friendship,

Nadine

