

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Do you remember me telling you about how bereaved families become unwilling educators about grief, because people just don't know what to do with us? They are afraid to make us cry, afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, and they just want us to go back to how we were before. Do you remember when I told you about the little girl at Aaron's daycare who came up to me and asked if Aaron was an angel now? Her mother was so uncomfortable and worried how I would react.

It gave me such comfort to know his little friends were asking about him and wondering where he was! It made me think what wonderful parents she had to take

the time to answer her questions and explain in a way she could understand, rather than change the subject or try to distract her.

You can imagine how dismayed I was to read that wonderful family lost their son recently. I did not know him because he was younger than his sister but the notice in the paper made him seem so full of life and laughter and love. It made me so sad to think that their family is now suffering the same loss we all have suffered.

I think it is especially hard this time of year to travel the path of grief. Halloween is the "kick-off" to the holiday season. We are inundated with commercials for costumes, candy, invitations to Halloween parties and trick-or-treaters. It is so difficult to handle your past or future memories of your own little one in costume shyly ringing the doorbell and quietly saying "twick or tweat", only after encouragement. We did, after all, teach our children not to take candy from strangers! What mixed signals we give as parents!

Perhaps people are asking now if your children are coming home for the holidays, where they are attending college, working, or living, etc. They may not have heard your child is now in Heaven, and there is usually a very awkward, uncomfortable pause when you share this information. They may very quickly find somewhere else they urgently need to be. Worst of all, they have heard and make no mention of your children or holiday plans because they don't want to make you cry or just don't know what to say.

Maybe this is your first holiday season as a bereaved family. You are shocked and dazed, numb or perhaps REALLY angry. Sometimes anticipation is far worse than the actual days, so it helps to have some kind of plan in place. Talk to your family, especially your spouse and surviving children. Maybe they feel they would get more comfort if everything is the same-extended family all together for a family meal for Thanksgiving, the Christmas tree in its usual place, and attendance together in church on Christmas Eve.

Perhaps your family would rather just be together in a different place during the holidays; like a ski vacation or a vacation to a warmer place. However you decide to handle the holidays is your decision as a family.

The biggest thing you need to remember is that you are not the same. Consider what is important to you, because your energy level and your attention span are going to be different. If it hurts too much to send out Christmas cards without signing your child's name-skip the cards this year.

If you want to still celebrate your child's birthday, do it. Make his favorite cake, take a balloon to the cemetery or do an activity you used to enjoy together. You may cry the whole time or feel comfort and healing that you honored your child and celebrated his life here.

Our Compassionate Friends monthly newsletter, chapter meetings and memorial services can offer more helpful opportunities on grieving through the holiday seasons and I encourage you to take one or more of those opportunities to help you get through this time. You will be in the company of Friends who understand your feelings and care, because they have walked or are walking the path to healing themselves. You do not have to travel this path alone.

I wish you comfort and healing in this time of reflection and harvest. I give thanks for the gifts of love, friendship and understanding.

Happy Birthday, Aaron! You will always be my favorite Superhero!

In friendship,

Nadine

