

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

I often wonder if the world would be a different place and people would treat each other differently if we could “see” the pain that others are going through. Would it make a difference or would we be as angry if someone cut us off in traffic if they had a name tag or bumper sticker that said “going through cancer treatment” or “just lost my job” and, especially “grieving the loss of my child”?

Compassionate Friends talk about the “face we show to the rest of the world” to get through our days. We are so fragile we get through the days and nights on auto-pilot, just going through the motions. We make some people so uncomfortable they tend to avoid us if they think we are having a bad day. They go into panic mode-“what should they say? Should they give us a hug? How long will this go on?” We end up stuffing our emotions until we can be in a safe place.

Back to the bumper sticker-when I first lost my son I spent a lot of time crying in the car. I’m pretty sure I was not a very safe driver those times-there were a number of times I couldn’t remember getting to the destination! Often we end up almost greedy for the company of other bereaved parents, because we have so many questions and wonder how they did it. What did they do with their child’s belongings? How do you answer when a stranger asks how many children you have, and their ages? How do you cope with the anger when it arrives? Who do you talk to about questions about your faith? Do you feel responsible for your child’s death? How do you cope if the people at your job are not very understanding or kind? And the best gift of all-can I tell you about my child? Can I tell you about how wonderful he is and how much I love and miss him?

Earlier this month I had the privilege of attending and speaking at the monthly Compassionate Friends meeting here in Billings. It felt like coming home. So many “old” and “new” Friends-we have shared so much, continued along the path to healing, and continue to share and support each other, especially our newest Friends who have just begun their journey. It is a privilege to hear the stories, problem-solve together over difficult situations and just realize “you’re not crazy-you are grieving”. It is so freeing and empowering to be told that you have the right to your feelings, good and bad. You get to be angry and feel cheated. You get to be sad and mad. You may find out that feeling responsible for your child’s death is pretty common, regardless of how your child died, and how to overcome that feeling you were a bad parent somehow. It may be helpful to learn that men and women grieve in different ways, how to understand where your spouse is coming from and help them process their feelings. You may find out that often you are in a different stage of grieving than your spouse, and how to acknowledge, validate and work through those different stages and feelings.

As with any new experience in your life, it is important to become educated about grief-how it can affect your physical, mental and emotional health. You can learn about taking care of yourself physically through diet, rest, and exercise; and emotionally and mentally through meditation, prayer, or spirituality. It is important to realize that you do not have to take this journey alone. You have kind, understanding Friends who have “walked the walk” and continue on their own journey to healing. We “get it”. Unlike the people whom we make so uncomfortable with our grieving, we are not going anywhere. We are here for as long as it takes, because helping you helps us with our own grief.

I wish you the comfort of knowing others understand and care. I wish you the freedom and healing of acknowledging all your feelings, and most of all I wish you the peace of knowing sometimes there just aren’t any answers. It doesn’t make the questions any easier, but we can ask the questions and try to figure them out together.

In friendship,

Nadine

