

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

I was watching one of my favorite movies "Castaway" the other night and I was struck by how many similarities there are between the situation the character in Castaway went through and what we as grieving families have either gone through or are going through now.

First we went through the terrible storm of our child's death, and then found ourselves isolated and adrift from our former lives and loved ones. We went through a time of denial where we could not believe this was happening. We felt certain we would be rescued-that this all surely was a bad dream.

As the hope of rescue (or waking up) became less and less likely, we felt alone and helpless-certain we could not survive. The Castaway character struggles with his will to survive and ending his life. Like us, to survive he had to be a little crazy, by "befriending" and talking to a volleyball. In that way he was able to problem-solve and give himself hope of survival. Little by little, day by day, we too realized we could survive after all. Our lives were not the same, and like the character in Castaway we had to fight to get off the island of despair and isolation.

Despite great odds the Castaway character finally gets back to civilization, but he soon realizes he cannot go back to his old life. The people who were part of his old life have moved on, and he realizes that though he is off the island he still has to learn to survive the pain of losing his fiancée and his old life. He now faces a new life with many changes. He doesn't have to worry any longer about physical survival, but he has to find a new job and new home without the love of his life. I was especially struck by a conversation he has with his father when he told him he learned to survive on the island by "just breathing in and out every day" because "you just don't know what the tide will bring you one day". In his case the tide brought in a makeshift sail he was able to use to get past the breakers.

We have all been through the terrible storm, but together we are "breathing in and out every day" and learning to survive, but each time we read of another unfortunate family losing their child it brings back afresh those first memories of our own child's death. That pain like a punch in the stomach, the disbelief, the shock and anger and the feeling of being singled out by the cosmos or the universe. We know too well all the questions those newly bereaved families have: "how do we do this? How do I go on without my child? Am I still a father, mother, brother, sister? How could God allow this to happen? Why was my child taken? He was only ..." and on and on.

Unlike the Castaway character we have each other to help us get through this journey of grief-we need not walk alone. We grieve not only the loss of our child, but the loss of our old life, our identity and future memories we will never have. It helps not only those newly bereaved, but the rest of us as well to reach out to those families. I know when we first lost our son I wanted to talk to other people who had experienced the loss of their child to find out how you learn to live through this. I wanted to talk about him without having people so uncomfortable they couldn't wait to get away from you. I wanted to be with people who could let me cry or vent my anger and not tell me "you shouldn't feel that way" or "are you still going to the cemetery every day". I wanted to be with people who understood all my crazy feelings and told me "you're not crazy-you're grieving". I wanted to be with people who knew I was still Aaron's mom, even if he had gone on to Heaven. I didn't want to hear all the platitudes unknowing people who mean to be kind say: "he's in a better place now", "he's not suffering any more". I know people were trying to be kind, but it made me feel angry and patronized (and a little homicidal).

We cannot go back to our old lives. We must learn how to live our new lives with our broken, mended hearts. We are fragile, but stronger than we think we are. We are still a family. We will learn to walk on the path to healing with the help, understanding and support of our Compassionate Friends. It won't be easy; we may have times we lose our way and feel we can't go on, but you honor your child by celebrating his life. You get up and try again and again. It does get better. You will remember your child and smile one day instead of crying.

I wish you comfort and healing and "kisses from Heaven" when you remember your child.

In friendship,

Nadine

