

# PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

How long will you grieve? The short answer is always. Will it always be the “kicked in the gut-beat to within an inch of your life” grief? No.

Experts have defined grieving in at least three different stages (disbelief/denial), (anger) and (acceptance). What they don't tell us is that it is common you don't finish one stage and then move on to the next. You can easily move back and forth from one stage to another in the journey of healing from grief.

Back to the question of the length of your grief. It differs from person to person, of course. A great deal depends on the circumstances of your child or sibling's death. If your child was the victim of a homicide or drunk driver, for example, you may go through months or years reliving the sharp pain and memories, even testifying in court as a victim while the case goes through the court system. If your child died by their own hand or as a result of a medical error you may spend months seeking answers, and remain stuck in the “denial” or “anger” phase until when or if you get answers.

If you blame yourself (I don't think I have ever met a grieving parent who didn't blame himself in some way or felt she didn't protect her child), and cannot forgive yourself, it also is difficult to move out of the denial or anger stages.

Have you ever noticed that many times people who don't have children are the first to offer parenting advice? You may experience this as a grieving parent as well. You may be told from people who have not experienced the death of a child “you shouldn't feel that way” or “it's God's will” or “are you still going to those meetings?” or “it's been two weeks-you need to get on with your life”. Really?

Your feelings are your feelings-good or bad-you get to feel however you wish. You get to decide how to grieve and for how long. If it brings you comfort to go to the cemetery every day and talk to your child, do it as long as you need to. If it brings you comfort to leave your child's room as he left it, do it.

Time does heal and soften your pain. You can live with a broken heart. You will never be the same person you were, and you will continue to grieve at each milestone in your life for the memories you didn't get to share with your child, but it does get better.

Seek out the company of people who have been through what you are going through. I promise another Compassionate Friend will never think you are crazy or judge the way you are dealing with your grief. It is so healing to hear how others are coping with their pain, and who honestly want to know you and your child or sibling. When I first attended a Compassionate Friends meeting I wanted and needed answers how I was going to live the rest of my life without my child. I wanted to be able to share how special my son was without others changing the subject or avoiding me. You know the “side step” people do when they are uncomfortable with your pain and grief and want to get away? You will not experience that at a Compassionate Friends meeting.

If you are physically unable or not ready to face others in a meeting, go to “The Compassionate Friends” on Facebook or in a search on the website under “www.compassionatefriends.org”. You can be directed to online support, books and articles to offer support, education or more.

The most important thing to remember is you are not alone. You don't have to take this journey by yourself and it doesn't have to be “self-guided”. Reach out for help. In reaching out to others who take your hand you help yourself and those who grab your hand to heal. Seek the answers you need, feel the feelings you feel and remember it will get better.

In friendship,

*Nadine*

