

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd
(dedicated to Sharon and Walt Marten)

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Is it possible to die from a broken heart? I'm sure almost all of us will answer "yes" to that question. All of us have felt such pain from our grief that our hearts literally feel broken. A Compassionate Friend remarked long ago that she felt such pain in her heart she often felt the need to look down and check if her heart had been ripped out of her chest. We often remind each other we are permanently changed-no longer the same person we were before our child, our grandchild or our sibling departed for Heaven. It often leads to changes in our relationships with other family members, our church family, our work relationships, and how we relate to the world and the "others", as another Friend called people who have not experienced the loss of a child.

The "others" just want us to go back to normal; how we were before we lost our child. They can be uncomfortable with our grief. They don't understand our tears, our reluctance to get rid of pictures of our child or our child's belongings. They don't understand our forgetfulness, our insomnia or the wish to escape into sleep all the time, or the changes in our appetite or loss of interest in food. The "others" don't understand if we need to go to the cemetery often to visit our child's grave or our need to attend Compassionate Friends meetings to be with people who understand and "get it".

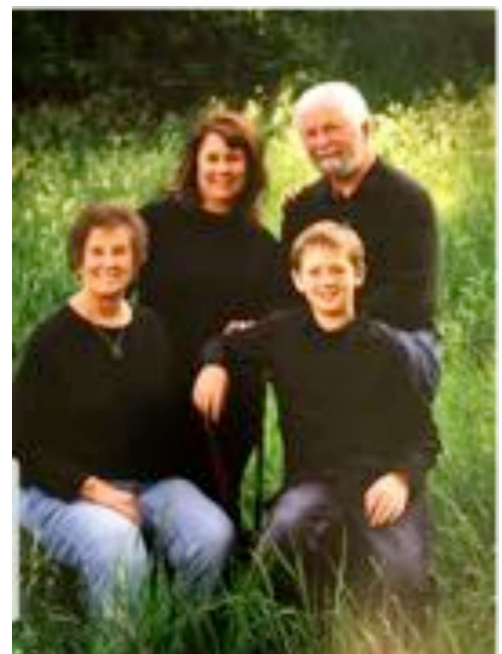
We live with broken hearts, but they can mend. Remember that everyone's journey of healing from grief is not the same. Remember as well that healing from the loss of a child is so different from any other kind of grief from loss of a loved one, because we grieve for the loss of future memories with that child. We are unique in our experiences, in our relationship with our child, and the circumstances of their death.

It is also not a smooth path to healing. There will be times when you have good days, think you are healing, and a sudden thought or memory can take you right back to the beginning. You don't move smoothly through the stages of grief; rather it is "one step forward, two steps back" It is important to be kind to yourself and forgive yourself when you think you are completely falling apart, and things will never be better. Time does help to heal. It also helps to heal to be with Friends who understand and support your feelings and care for you and your remaining loved ones. A support group is truly that-we cannot take away your pain and feelings, but we can show you we care and help support and "walk with" you on your path to healing. Those of us who are a little further down the path to healing can help give you encouragement how to deal with deciding when and what you wish to do (if anything) with your child's belongings, or how to respond when a stranger asks how many children you have, or how to handle family gatherings.

In last month's column we said goodbye to a wonderful Friend, Sharon Marten, who was a huge part of our Compassionate Friends leadership group. This month we have to say goodbye to another equally wonderful Friend, Walt Marten, Sharon's husband, who departed for Heaven only three weeks after his beloved wife. He truly died of a broken heart.

When I think of Walt and Sharon, the word "partners" comes to mind. They were partners in life, partners in parenthood and grandparenthood, and partners in all of the hobbies and interests they both had in their lifetime, including leadership and participation in Compassionate Friends for many years. It always seemed to me that when either Walt or Sharon had an idea the other was there to "make it happen" and lend support.

So long, my Friends. We will miss your dedication, enthusiasm and leadership and mentoring to others in pain. It takes a tremendous amount of energy to minister to others to help them heal when you are healing yourself, but you both did it with kindness, graciousness and dignity. I'm glad you can be together in eternity with your beloved son. Look in on us now and then to keep on with our mission to help other bereaved parents and siblings.



In friendship,

Nadine