

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Grief is like a long, bitterly cold winter. You withdraw and hide away from the coldness of our pain and isolation and seek the light and warmth of your life before your grief. Sometimes, when we think we might be able to burrow out from under the heavy burden of grief, get a peek at the sun and our “old normal”, we get buried again with another crippling layer of despair and pain.

You sleep more to shut out the anguish of living without your child and hope that your child will come to you in your dreams.

You function through your life on “auto-pilot”, moving and working through the patterns of your life, but you feel numb and detached from the rest of the world. Our lives, our identities and our self-worth have been shattered, and it takes a long time to patch them back together. You lose your ideals, faith, trust in yourself and God and sense of control.

I remember how idealistic I was, how much energy and passion I used to have, and the strong sense of fairness I had. For most of my life I believed if you worked hard, trusted God, loved and took care of your family, tried to make your community a better place, sharing what you have with those less fortunate, you would be rewarded with a happy, loving family, comfortable financial lifestyle and fulfilling life. I believed that bad things only happened to other people.

Then Aaron became ill, and despite all our prayers, loving and caring for him the best we could, he died. After nearly 30 years, it's still hard to say that word! It has taken many years (and still trying!) to get over the unfairness of his illness and death. He was such a special, loving, wonderful little boy. We loved him so much, and it was so hard to see him suffer through all the medical procedures, needles and hospital stays. He was so young he didn't understand why he didn't feel well and couldn't keep up with other children his age. It still deeply saddens me that his brothers never got to know him and grow up with him.

Healing from grief takes a tremendous amount of energy-physical and emotional-and it takes a huge amount of energy just to function. It is exhausting just getting out of bed in the morning, getting through the day at work, caring for your family, paying bills and keeping the shattered shell of your life on track. It is exhausting “taking care” of people who are trying to take care of you. You know what I mean-those well-meaning people who believe they are helping you by calling you all the time, trying to get you out of the house and to events that mean nothing to you, and sharing constantly what **your** loss has meant to **them**. For a long time after Aaron's death, it was not helpful or healing for me to be around these well-meaning people, because I just didn't have the energy or patience to take care of their needs.

It takes even more energy when you get to the “anger” stage of grieving. I still get very sad and angry when I see or hear people who don't appreciate or love their children, and especially if they verbally or physically abuse them. I became pretty vocal at work sometimes with parents who were very angry with their children with choices they had made.

It is important to remember that you are not always going to feel this badly-this deep, gut-wrenching pain. You **will** feel warmth and light and joy again. This doesn't mean you won't occasionally be blind-sided with another snowstorm of grief and despair, but it does get better with time, and the snowstorms don't come as often. Some day you may catch yourself smiling! Some day you may go an entire day without crying! Some day you may be able to put your child's pictures in an album without breaking down.

We are like the first flowers of spring, tentative, barely holding on in the strong wind, but beautiful, strong and able to survive. We give hope and comfort to those also struggling with the pain and isolation of their grief. We understand because we have been there. We care because we understand, and we care because someone else cared for us.

I wish you healing and comfort from the light and warmth of your love for your child, and those who love you. Hang on-it does get better and you can survive!

In friendship,

Nadine

