



## PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Grief has certain milestones, along with any other journey in our lives. The most obvious of those milestones are the first few anniversaries of your child or sibling's birthday or date of death, of course. We certainly expect that holidays, like Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter will also be tough to get through. You might be getting along and coping pretty well, thinking you made it through those big ones, and then something unexpected comes along, and you are right back to step one. Maybe this year your child would have gone to kindergarten, or lost his first tooth, or began walking and talking. Maybe this year your child would have gone to college or attended his first prom. Maybe this year your child or sibling would have gone through Driver's Ed, got his first job or bought a car.

Grieving the loss of a child or sibling is so different than losing another loved one, even a parent or grandparent, because you mourn the loss of future memories, not just past memories.

I would also like to give credit and recognition this month to some other very special people in a child's life—grandparents. Grandparents serve a special and unique role in a child's life because they offer an unconditional love to their grandchild. Grandparents usually have more free time to spend with their grandchild and are not caught up in the discipline and rigid schedules their parent must maintain to keep the family structure going. Most grandparents I know are completely convinced their grandchild is the smartest, cutest and best child(ren) that ever lived. This unconditional love is such a gift to a child and contributes so much to their self-esteem and confidence. However, this unconditional love is a double edged sword with the loss of a child, because not only does the grandparent grieve the loss of their grandchild, but must see the suffering and pain of their own child, and try to comfort their own child the best they can, in addition to dealing with their own grief and loss.

One way to cope with this love and grief within a family is to keep the memories of your child alive, either through stories (verbal or written) and pictures. Another is to remember special anniversary dates with cards and celebrations—perhaps with a birthday cake, balloons on that child's gravesite, special family dinner or the like. A word of caution, however: not everyone grieves the same way or on the same timeline, so it is important to communicate with family members how you wish to honor your child's birthday or other milestone event so that if someone is not up to celebration and chooses not to participate there are no feelings of being left out or not included.

Several Friends and family members who lost a sibling when they were growing up have mentioned that pictures and other memories of that sibling were put away and the family never spoke of that child. They felt it was so important to allow the siblings to speak about that child and share pictures and memories to help the family heal, and expressed admiration and appreciation at our decision to leave Aaron's pictures, Christmas stocking and drawings up. I told them that even though Aaron lives in Heaven now he still is and always will be part of our family, and it felt wrong to take down his pictures or not put up his Christmas stocking. Aaron and his dad, who passed away in 2018, are very much still part of our lives and always will be, and we feel their absence greatly.

I wish you comfort and healing as the milestones come along. Remember you are not alone on this path to healing. Remember to take the time to grieve and share memories with others who love your child, grandchild or sibling. It hurts so much, especially at first, but can be so freeing and help lessen the pain of your loneliness.

In friendship,

*Nadine*

