

## "The Fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain"

We don't know each other when we meet on the street, at church, or at a meeting, but once our loss is known, people quietly share their pain with us. When we are alone with someone, a voice is lowered, eyes are downcast, and in a whisper we hear, "You probably don't know this, but I lost someone..." And for a few moments, we are immersed in each other's pain as someone shares their awful secret, knowing that we share a loss that is so profound that no one truly "gets it" without having walked in our shoes. It may be a child gone for decades, a spouse we never knew, or an end so terrible it is never spoken of, but for just a moment we truly understand each other at a level so profound it cannot be described. It brings us a moment of peace to share our loss with another and know we are not alone. Someone will quietly say, "We need to talk ... not now, but when we are alone," and you will know that they are fellow travelers on your journey. Strangely, they arrive from nowhere when you least expect it and sometimes when you need it most.

I will not forget the snow plow driver clearing my drive way who learned of my loss. He stopped in the driving snow, locked eyes with me and in a very low voice said, "I carry a seven year old boy in my head. I'll never forget him; I see him every day. That's all I can say." He climbed back into his truck and slowly turned to me and said, "If you ever need anything, call me. You understand? Call me," and slowly drove away.

I remember the hardened woman at the RMV who stopped cold when she saw my son's death certificate and locked eyes with me in an intense stare. She stopped my mumbled explanations about missing forms with a soft, "Wait here," and spoke with the Manager returning with my plates and receipt. "It gets better," she said softly and called, "Next."

The Police Officer on a detail on my street asked about my son. When I told him, his eyes grew wet and he pulled off his glove and took my hand. "Whatever you need, whenever you need it," he said, handing me his card. "Call me," he said, "and I mean that."

As we arranged for a memorial stone, the woman at the Monument Company quietly shared her story with us. She lost two adult sons in two years, at the same age as our son. We were instantly friends and confidants.

The bond is instant and deep; your eyes lock and

feelings flow unspoken; you have things to share that are so private, yet you share them with this stranger who is suddenly closer than family. "We need to talk ..." "yes, we do."



In a world of the well-meaning "I know how you feel" (how could you know?) or "It will get better (no, it will get different, not better,) we may feel angry at inept greeting card expressions of grief. We must not forget that there is no common language for grief in our culture, no shared set of ways of acting and speaking that address the need to reach out to others in this time of crisis. People do the best that they can and we must accept the awkwardness and hesitation as simple acts of compassion.

Eventually, the time comes when you face another grieving parent who has no idea of your loss or your pain and is facing the same torment that you live with every day. You watch for a private moment and you whisper, "We need to talk..."

We are fellow travelers on a rocky road; we are The Compassionate Friends, as Albert Schweitzer so eloquently put it, "we are the fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain."

By John MacDonald, TCF NorthShore/Boston  
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## In Memory of Carla Palomba

I wrote an article in April 2009, in memory of my daughter, Carla, and it still holds true today. I am going to repeat this article as it fits in with the previous article.

*In a time time after I lost you, I can't say whether it was long or short since time had no meaning, my neighbor lost a child. He was killed in a car accident while the other passengers survived. I immediately went over there and I didn't know what to say. I remember reading in a newsletter that we bereaved parents should go to other bereaved parents as we **know** what to say or do. But, I did not. After I lost you, there was nothing anyone could say or do that would be the right thing.*