

COMPARING

On the educational television channel there was a program called "I'm Glad I'm Alive". It was about children who were dying of cancer or leukemia. It showed how the children and their families handled situations and experiences before the child died.

My immediate thought was for the parents and how they were going to feel when their child died. Then I thought how fortunate they were that they had time to love him/her knowing that they were going to die. I thought, "At least they will have time to say good-bye. My son was smiling and happy one minute and only a few minutes later he lay crumpled and dead on the ground. I didn't have time to hold him and tell him how much I loved him." I sat there feeling that my hurt was greater.

Then it struck me that I was comparing my pain and the depth of my grief with theirs. It is that same comparing that I object to when a parent says to me, "But Arthur was only six when he died, mine was eighteen. You didn't know him as long as I knew my child."

When grieving parents make this statement to me, I feel a clutching in my gut that says, "How dare you". To me they are implying that the circumstances surrounding their child's death are more painful than mine, and that my pain should be less. Resentment immediately wells up in me. I do not see how my grief over the death of my beautiful six-year-old son could have been any greater or any less.

I hurt because my child, at that time and that place in his life, was taken away from me. My love and need for Arthur, and my experience with him were as full as they could have been at that moment. Had he been older than six, or younger than six, my pain would have come from that point. I experienced that child to the fullest I had the capacity for at that particular time. It only follows that I will grieve to my fullest.

Each of us experiences our own pain. I hurt because MY child is dead. Grief does not come to us in percentages; so much for men, so much for women, so much if your child was ten, so much if she was twenty-five, so much because he was five days old, or so much because two children died in the same accident. It came to

each of us in the total capacity that we have to feel. It is our pain, our loss, our suffering, and our child.

If I stubbed my toe I would not feel less pain when I met a man who broke his leg. If I cut my finger and you were operated on the same day, try as I may I could not feel your incision. I could only feel my cut finger. I can only feel my own pain.

To compare the depth of our grief by comparing circumstances with another bereaved parent is wrong. When we do this we negate their feelings as well as our own. If we think that the circumstances surrounding their grief are greater than our own, we are telling ourselves that we shouldn't be grieving as deeply as we are. If we think their circumstances are less, we are implying they shouldn't hurt as much as they do. This is unfair and cruel.

To compare is to imply judgment, and there is no place for judgment among bereaved parents. The secret to survival and to quicker healing is the sharing of a common bond, empathy, and understanding, not comparison and judgment.