

Welcome to Holland

By Emily Perl Kingsley

This essay was written about the author's experience as the mother of a child with Down syndrome. Her analogy can be helpful to all of us as we face many different and often unexpected challenges in life.

It's like . . . planning a fabulous vacation trip—to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide-books and make your wonderful plans. The Colosseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland!?" you say. "What do you mean, Holland? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. You've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is . . . they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting,

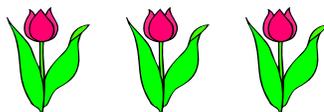
filthy place, full of pestilence, famine, and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guide-books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around, and you begin to notice that Holland has wind-mills. Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy, and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

But if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.



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