



Welcome to Holland

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it. Try to imagine how it would feel. It's like this . . .

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous trip to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum, Michelangelo's 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 flight attendant 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 of my life I wanted to go to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland, and there you must stay. The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible filthy disgusting place full of pestilence, famine, and disease. It's just a different place.

So you go out and buy new guidebooks. And you 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. It is slower paced than Italy -- less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around. You notice that Holland has windmills, Holland has tulips, and Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going to Italy, and they're 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."

The pain of that will never, ever, ever go away because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss. But as you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, very lovely things about Holland.

Emily Pearl Kingsley