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Welcome to Holland!! By Emily Pearl Kingsley

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, and to imagine how it would feel. It feels like this...

When you are going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip – to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide books and make wonderful plans, the Coliseum, Michelangelo's David, the gondolas in Venice, you may even learn some 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. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy!"

She calmly says, "There has been a change of flight plan".

They have landed in Holland and there you must stay. The important thing is that 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 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 than Italy, less flashy, but, after you have been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills, tulips, and it even has Rembrandts!!

Everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy, and they are bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. For the rest of your life you will say, "Yes, that is where I was supposed to go, that is what I planned."

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

