

WELCOME TO HOLLAND

by Emily Perl Kingsley

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

*When you're going to have a
baby, it's like planning a
fabulous vacation trip - to Italy.
You buy a bunch of guide books
and make your wonderful plans.
The Coliseum.*

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. They've 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 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. It's 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... and you begin to

*notice that Holland has
windmills...and 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."

*And the pain of that will never,
ever, ever, ever go away... because*

*the loss of that dream is a very
very significant loss.*

*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.*

