

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

So you must go out and buy a new guidebook. 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, 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."

The pain of that will never, ever, go away, because the loss of that dream is a 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.

Written by Emily Perl Kingsley

Autism Is Nothing Like Going to Holland

October 23, 2017 by [not an autism mom](#)

There's a very famous poem called "Welcome to Holland," written by Emily Perl Kingsley. It's a beautiful poem, if you haven't read it. To summarize, Kingsley describes what it feels like to raise a child with special needs. She says that planning for a child is like planning an exciting trip to Italy. But when your child has a disability, your plane winds up in Holland instead.



Holland isn't as flashy or exciting as Italy. But it's pretty, slower paced, and has windmills. And even though you really wanted that trip to Italy, you appreciate Holland for all of its beauty and serenity.

I used to love that poem. I would post it on my Facebook page and tag moms I thought would appreciate the gesture. I've even been sent that poem from time to time by well-meaning loved ones. And I appreciated the gesture. I still do.

But the truth is, *in my house*, autism is nothing like going to Holland. Autism isn't pretty. It isn't serene. It isn't slow paced.

In my house, autism is more like trekking through the jungle without a map. It's loud. It's confusing. It's unforgiving.

The jungle is filled with cries that I can't understand. It's littered with obstacles that take all my strength to work through. There are dead ends around each corner, forcing me to backtrack and rethink my approach.

Don't be fooled by the media, portraying the jungle as exotic and intriguing. I can assure you that's only on the outskirts. Deep in the trenches, the jungle is often harsh, and it rarely sleeps.



The jungle can be a lonely place sometimes. It's isolating. Sure, there are times I could call my friends in Italy, but I'm simply too exhausted from my daily excursions.

Luckily, most of the locals are very friendly and eager to help. You see, these locals have been on their own journeys for quite a while now. They are much more knowledgeable than I am. But they've split into different tribes. Each tribe has their own idea of the best path. And they end up sending me in opposite directions.

So I try to absorb all the knowledge I can from each of them, and I continue to push through – knowing I will wind up lost and need their help again.

Don't get me wrong. There's fun to be had in the jungle. There are times of exploration and silliness. It just takes a lot more planning than it would in Italy or Holland. It takes more effort to make sure we stay safe.

There are also moments of intense beauty – like when the sun sets just after a storm. The entire sky lights up with colors I haven't seen in a long, long time.

And there are moments of surprise and accomplishment – Like happening upon a hidden waterfall after a long, strenuous hike.



Those are the moments I hold on to – Those are the moments the jungle doesn't seem so scary.

No, I didn't ask for this journey. But I will continue to push through, even when I feel weary. Because that's what mothers do. And my little one is worth it.
