

August 1999

Keys for Living

This month the key is: "Enjoying Holland"

As some of you may know, I used to do pediatric hospice work. The piece that follows was handed out at the funeral of one of the children with whom I had worked. (I do not know where the original piece came from.) The child had been born with physical challenges that made it clear the child would not live more than a decade, if that. The mother of this child gave me permission to share this piece and its context.

I believe this piece is a wonderful metaphor for not only what it is like to have a child with a disability, but also many other situations in life. **Often we are given situations** that are not a part of our original life plan: being without children, experiencing a divorce, losing a job, - the list could go on. Some things are life-changing, others just not what we had planned! **The point is that we have options** - options about how we handle the situations we are given, how we grieve our losses, how we let go and move on, or create new situations. So **I offer this piece as a metaphor for life - whether we end up in Italy or Holland.**

Welcome to Holland, by Emily Pen 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, 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 a few 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 guidebooks. 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 is what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, 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.