



MY JOURNEY TO HOLLAND

Holland has windmills....and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

In 1987 Emily Perl Kingsley wrote a short essay called "Welcome to Holland". Several years back, long before our Holland (or even our Italy plans), someone shared this with me. It struck a chord with me. It has become somewhat of an analogy to my journey to motherhood, and more recently becoming Max's mom. This is the essay:

"Welcome to Holland"

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."

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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.

My Journey

In late 2012 my husband and I made the decision to register as a waiting, adoptive family with the National Down Syndrome Adoption Network. A decision that would forever change our lives. NDSAN provides support to birth families who've

received a Down syndrome diagnosis. They help them either in their journey to parent or to navigate the road to adoption, if that's what they decide is best. Their mission is to ensure that every child born with Down syndrome has the opportunity to grow up in a loving family. They work tirelessly and do so much good. We are forever grateful for all they've done for our family.

When we made the decision to be added to the NDSAN registry, we had already been approved and hoping to adopt again for a little over two years. We were registered with a private adoption agency. We had been considered by several different birth families over that time, but for different reasons we were never able to successfully adopt. Something just didn't feel right and I couldn't shake the idea that we would have a child with special needs. I had felt that way since we first started talking about having children. Before I even knew, that my journey to motherhood would be through adoption. It took my husband a little longer to be fully on board. Let me be clear, it wasn't that he was against having a child with Down syndrome, it was only the timing. We both understood what a huge, and expensive, undertaking it is to adopt a child, let alone a child with special needs, and we wanted to be sure that we were as prepared as we could be.

This was never our "Plan B". You know, we did this because there were no typical children available. Not at all. This is what we wanted. This was my

dream. My heart ached for the day I would get to hold our special, little angel. The one I always felt was waiting for me in Heaven. See, David and I had both spent significant time with children and adults who have Down syndrome. We understood the physical, mental and emotional needs these individuals can have. We knew that although a child with Down syndrome has different needs than a typical child, the reward of love and joy that comes with the extra time and effort is worth every minute of hard work. I was excited and ready to do my absolute best to give our next child everything they would need to grow up happy, healthy and successful.

Fast forward to Spring 2014. We were again contacted about being considered by a birth family for a baby boy who would be born with Down syndrome. We had been through this several times previously. Like always, we said we wanted to be considered, within 20 minutes we were in contact with the birth mother and the rest is history! That was Max. This was our little guy. It was finally our time.

Max is 20 months old now. We have an amazing relationship with his birth mom and all of her family. We are so in love with Max and just can't imagine our life without him. I can say without a doubt, that although my journey in Holland hasn't been long, it's been worth it. It truly is one of the best things that has happened in my life. I never knew I could love this deeply. Max has given me a totally new outlook on life and a much greater appreciation for the little things. When I

envisioned my path to motherhood, I never in a million years would have expected it to lead here, but there are no words to express the gratitude for where I am today and what I'm blessed with. It's different here, it's not Italy, but it's so beautiful.

Although we are so in love and so very happy, it's not to be mistaken that everything is perfect or easy. Let's be honest, it's hard to be a parent to a child with special needs. Some days are really, really hard. Most days there is a therapist coming, or a therapy to be to, or another doctor's appointment to be at. It's stressful and can be overwhelming, but what's the most difficult is watching Max struggle with the physical and

developmental obstacles that are in his way. Max's "team" of physical therapists, occupational therapists, play therapist, speech therapists, his pediatrician and many, many specialists help him face his challenges head on. Slowly, but surely, he's doing it. Each milestone or goal met is a huge celebration! Milestone by little milestone, goal by small goal he'll overcome the obstacles he faces. He'll be the very best Max he can be.

Every time I look at Max, he's a reminder that landing in Holland was one of the best things that's ever happened to me. He's absolutely perfect. He's my Holland Tour Guide. I'm a Holland Tourist...and it sure is beautiful here.



“MY JOURNEY TO HOLLAND” AUTHOR

Jaime Robertson lives outside Portland, Oregon with her husband and kids. She is an adoptive mom of two, Oakley (7) and Max (20 months). She enjoys photography, running and just being with her family.