

## Welcome to Holland

"When you're going to have a baby, it's like you're planning a vacation in Italy. You're all excited. You get a whole bunch of guidebooks, you learn a few phrases in Italian so you can get around, and then it comes time to pack your bags and head for the airport - for Italy.

"Only when you land, the stewardess says 'Welcome to Holland'. You look at one another in disbelief and shock, saying 'Holland? What are you talking about? I signed up for Italy.'

"But they explain there's been a change of plans, and you've landed in Holland, and there you must stay. 'But I don't know anything about Holland! I don't want to stay!' you say."

"But you stay. You go out and buy some new guidebooks, you learn some new phrases and you meet people you never knew existed. The important thing is that you are not in a filthy, plaque-infested slum full of pestilence and famine. You are simply in a different place than you had planned. It's slower paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy, but after you've been there a little while and you have a chance to catch your breath, you begin to discover that Holland has windmills. Holland has tulips. Holland has Rembrandts."

"But everyone else you know is busy coming and going from Italy. They're all bragging about what a great time they had there and for the rest of your life, you will say: 'Yes, that's what I had planned.'

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

By Emily Perl Kingsley



## Celebrating Holland - I'm Home

By Cathy Anthony

(My follow-up to the original "Welcome to Holland" by Emily Perl Kingsley)

I have been in Holland for over a decade now. It has become home. I have had time to catch my breath, to settle and adjust, to accept something different than I'd planned.

I reflect back on those years of past when I had first landed in Holland. I remember clearly my shock, my fear, my anger - the pain and uncertainty. In those first few years, I tried to get back to Italy as planned, but Holland was where I was to stay. Today, I can say how far I have come on this unexpected journey. I have learned so much more. But, this too has been a journey of time.

I worked hard. I bought new guidebooks. I learned a new language and I slowly found my way around this new land. I have met others whose plans had changed like mine, and who could share my experience. We supported one another and some have become very special friends.

Some of these fellow travellers had been in Holland longer than I and were seasoned guides, assisting me along the way. Many have encouraged me. Many have taught me to open my eyes to the wonder and gifts to behold in this new land. I have discovered a community of caring. Holland wasn't so bad.

I think that Holland is used to wayward travellers like me and grew to become a land of hospitality, reaching out to welcome, to assist and to support newcomers like me in this new land. Over the years, I've wondered what life would have been like if I'd landed in Italy as planned. Would life have been easier? Would it have been as rewarding? Would I have learned some of the important lessons I hold today?

Sure, this journey has been more challenging and at times I would (and still do) stomp my feet and cry out in frustration and protest.

And, yes, Holland is slower paced than Italy and less flashy than Italy, but this too has been an unexpected gift. I have learned to slow down in ways too and look closer at things, with a new appreciation for the remarkable beauty of Holland with its' tulips, windmills and Rembrandts.

I have come to love Holland and call it Home.

I have become a world traveler and discovered that it doesn't matter where you land. What's more important is what you make of your journey and how you see and enjoy the very special, the very lovely, things that Holland, or any land, has to offer.

Yes, over a decade ago I landed in a place I hadn't planned. Yet I am thankful, for this destination has been richer than I could have imagined!