

THE SPECIAL MOTHER

Read at a SAMHSA workshop

Most women become mothers by accident, some by choice, a few by social pressures, and a couple by habit. This year, nearly 100,000 women will become mothers of disabled children. Did you ever wonder how mothers of disabled children are chosen?

Somehow, I visualize God hovering over Earth selecting His instruments for propagation with great care and deliberation. As He observes, He instructs His angels to make notes in a giant ledger:

"Armstrong, Beth, son. Patron saint, Matthew."

"Forest, Marjorie, daughter. Patron saint, Cecilia."

"Rutledge, Carrie, twins. Patron saint...give her Gerald. He's used to profanity."

Finally, He passes a name to an angel and smiles. "Give her a disabled child."

The angel is curious. "Why this one, God? She's so happy."

"Exactly," smiles God. "Could I give a disabled child to a mother who does not know laughter? That would be cruel."

"But does she have patience?" asks the angel.

"I don't want her to have too much patience, or she will drown in a sea of self-pity and despair. Once the shock and resentment wear off, she'll handle it."

"I watched her today. She has that sense of self and independence that are so rare and so necessary in a mother. You see, the child I'm going to give her has his own world. She has to make it live in her world and that's not going to be easy."

"But Lord, I don't think she even believes in you."

God smiles, "No matter, I can fix that. This one is perfect. She has just enough selfishness."

The angel gasps. "Selfishness? Is that a virtue?"

God nods. "If she can't separate herself from the child occasionally, she'll never survive. Yes, here is a woman whom I will bless with a child less than perfect. She doesn't realize it yet, but she is to be envied."

"She will never take for granted a spoken word. She will never consider a step ordinary.

When her child says "Momma" for the first time, she will be witness to a miracle and know it. When she describes a tree or a sunset to her blind child, she will see it as few people ever see my creations."

"I will permit her to see clearly the things I see – ignorance, cruelty, prejudice – and allow her to rise above them. She will never be alone. I will be at her side every minute of every day of her life because she is doing my work as surely as she is here by my side."

"And what about her patron saint?" asks the angel, his pen poised in mid-air.

God smiles. "A mirror will suffice."

WELCOME TO HOLLAND

by Emily Pearl Kingsley

"I am often asked to describe an 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 has 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, filthy place, full of famine and disease. It's just a different place. So you must 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 a little while, 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.

THE BATTLE

by Linda Jackson
Family Ties Member

As I look around this table, at the faces I see around it
They remind me of knights, battle weary with dented armor,
which tells a dreadful tale.

We fight against those who would simply label our children and walk away.

We fight and demand the services they need.

We fight and struggle with them day by day,
hoping and praying not another hospital stay

Doctors with new medications, will this one fail or succeed?

We fight to save the children who have no affliction,

but believe they are forgotten.
They see this battle with Mental Illness
They see on you it takes its toll
They see you fight to save this child's life and soul
They rest assured that you would do no less if it were them.
They know all too well how exhausted and drained you are
when each battle is done.
As well all look forward to the day when this war is won.
Hear me, so that you may know your reward may not come in this life,
But your deeds are well documented by your Father in Heaven.
For you see, He knew long before your birth what trials you would go through,
And had He not known the strength of character and spirit
He placed within your body
He would not have placed this cup before you.

-- End --