

Why Tulips?

Tulips hold a special meaning for me, and not just for their beautiful array of colors. Twenty-six years ago, when I was pregnant with my younger daughter, her dad and I received the news that she had Trisomy-21, also known as Down syndrome. At that time, I only knew a few people who had developmental or intellectual disabilities. I was unprepared for this diagnosis. The dark clouds started to roll over me.

My OB referred us to a geneticist. The geneticist proceeded to tell us that the baby did not have a bright future. The baby would not talk, walk, learn to read, or live independently. The clouds and my mood became darker. A friend checked out every book in the county library system on children with T-21. She knew I needed facts and data to help process the information. When I told people, they gave the “so sorry” head tilt or, worse, said “but you’re a lawyer and you’re still going ahead?” The clouds grew darker, and my exasperation deepened.

Meanwhile, her dad was telling everyone that the baby has T-21, beaming that he would be a dad again. When he told our Lamaze coach, she gave him the name and contact information for her friend who had a son with T-21. I reluctantly called her. We talked on the phone. She gave me the name of the [ARC of Essex County](#)’s program, [Stepping Stones](#), and dropped off more recent information at my home. Her best advice: “Do not read anything about T-21 that’s more than 3-5 years old.” Included in the material was an essay, “[Welcome to Holland](#)” by Emily Perl Kingsley. A small ray of light started to flicker.

I made an appointment to meet the director of Stepping Stones. As I sat on a bench, waiting for the director, a group of 5 or 6 preschoolers exited the physical therapy room. They all had T-21. They were walking without assistance, heading upstairs. They were holding hands and singing “Hi ho, hi ho, off to lunch we go.” They were smiling. The dark clouds disappeared. My baby would walk, talk, and even sing. She would have friends. She would be happy. She would have a full life.

Upon returning home, I told her dad about my appointment. I re-read the “[Welcome to Holland](#)” essay. It explained exactly how I was feeling. My baby’s future will follow a slightly different path than her sister’s. That future will be bright, colorful, albeit a bit slower, less flashy. I framed and hung the essay in my office. I now had a reference point when I was asked about my baby. And the staff at Stepping Stones helped shape my voice and strengthen my resilience.

Why tulips? Tulips are colorful but their petals are fragile. They remind me of the different path my family has taken. As Kingsley wrote, “*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.*” When I see tulips, I envision the possibilities that lie ahead.