

Book Review

Title: *Missing Pieces: A Chronicle of Living With a Disability*

Author: Irving K. Zola; new foreword by Nancy Mairs

Publisher: Temple University Press, 2003 (reprint of 1983 edition)

Paper, ISBN: 1-59213-244-8

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Reviewer: Mark F. Romoser

Irv Zola's classic "Missing Pieces," is subtitled, "A Chronicle of Living with a Disability." Oddly, when Zola arrives at a Dutch village called Het Dorp -- simply, "The Village" -- he does not consider himself to be a person with a disability, despite the use of leg brace, back brace, and cane.

Het Dorp is no ordinary Dutch village. It exists to provide people with significant physical disabilities a place to live, semi-independently. Zola, a professor of sociology, has come to Het Dorp during an exchange professorship in Leiden. Not content merely to observe, he asks to be treated as a resident of Het Dorp. The journey truly begins when he puts down his cane and sits in a wheelchair, with "an unaccustomed plop" (p. 52).

It's all here in this world-within-a-world. People who have had accidents consider themselves superior to those with progressive diseases because they're not at risk for becoming "more disabled". Oddly, for this purpose, polio was considered an "accident"; people in 1972 knew nothing of post-polio sequelae (p.53, 83). Sexuality, too, simmers beneath the placid surface of Het Dorp. When Zola catches sight of raven-haired Marlene, the same fellow who dated in high school using crutches is astonished to find himself attracted to a woman who uses a wheelchair (p. 53)!

In her foreword to this new edition, Nancy Mairs insightfully points out that nothing like Het Dorp exists, or could exist, in the United States, with its historical antipathy toward funding of social programs. Why, then, is there a feeling gnawing away at Zola that something is missing at Het Dorp?

The lesson Zola learns, taught most effectively by the few married couples at Het Dorp, is that at the end of the day, Het Dorp is an institution. If and when that day comes, *Missing Pieces* will stand as an important historical document of the institutional era: of everything such an institution could be, and more importantly, that which it could never be.