

## An Orange Socks Story - Sarah and Jeremy: Down syndrome Adoption

Interview by: Gerald Nebeker, President of Orange Socks

Welcome to the Orange Socks podcast, where we are inspiring life despite a diagnosis. I'm your host, Dr. Gerald Nebeker. In this episode I speak with Sarah and Jeremy, about their experience adopting, Maria, a beautiful girl from Armenia. I know you're going to love hearing their story.

Gerald: Sarah and Jeremy have always felt the call to adopt a child.

Sarah: Our adoption story started about 13 years before we first saw Maria. We felt over those years that God was drawing us to adopt some day.

Jeremy: When we started talking about adoption as a family, we remembered an experience we had with our oldest son. He had open-heart surgery when he was born. We started looking into children who may have heart conditions. We chose this because we are used to working with cardiologists, and we understand that process. Through that we learned that a lot of children who have Down syndrome also have heart conditions. That was just something we were open to.

Sara: We have four boys, Noah, he is 13, Liam, 10, Luke is almost 8, and Jack is 5. They are very active little boys. Noah had a heart defect when he was born and underwent open-heart surgery at 8 days old. They're just keeping us on our toes, we are very busy with them. We adopted Maria from Yerevan Armenia. When we were looking up listings, we saw Maria's face right away. I had seen these faces before over the years and they are always just so cute and you want to adopt them all. But something was very different when I saw Maria's face, and it was as if God told me, "That that's your daughter, go get her." We were very excited to introduce a girl into the family. I'd always wanted to be a mother of a little girl. I love all my boys, but I just felt like Jeremy would be such a great dad to a little girl. We also thought it would be a really cool experience for our boys to have a little sister. I really want them to be protectors and strong men who look after others. I think that would be something vital to them becoming those types of men. I knew they would be great big brothers to her, and we were very excited to be able to bring her home and see that take place.

Gerald: Maria fit right in to their lively family.

Jeremy: So, our boys were really ecstatic to be getting a sister, it felt really foreign to them.

Gerald: Adopting a child with Down syndrome was the unique decision that Sarah and Jeremy both felt strongly about.

Sarah: For me, because I had never really known anyone with Down syndrome in my life, I definitely know that it's important to talk. A lot of people don't have experiences and relationships with people with Down syndrome, so it creates this fear because you don't know what that's like. We also became more aware about Down syndrome. I didn't know I would end up adopting a child at that point. We definitely just came across blogs or articles from families that were raising children with Down syndrome. We became aware of the joy and beauty that their lives bring through all of the things that they do. Even in their ability to communicate in different ways. They are a special and unique people. Everyone should get to know someone with Down syndrome now. By the time we were talking seriously about adopting, I mentioned the idea to my friend. She had adopted before and was telling us about Rainbow kids. I told her, "Yeah, I think we would adopt someone with Down syndrome."

Jeremy: We didn't pick a country, when you have a baby, you just have a baby that you're blessed with. With adoption I almost preferred not being able to choose where she comes from. With Maria it sort of worked out that way. We had this website link and we opened it up and I think she was the first child that popped up. Sarah walked in and showed me the picture and said, "I think this is her," and I said, "Yeah, let's do it." It was like if somebody came in and said, "Hey I'm pregnant." I was just excited, we didn't know she was from Armenia.

Gerald: The adoption process may seem overwhelming, but Sarah and Jeremy say that if you take it one step at a time, anyone who feels the prompting to adopt a child with special needs can bring their child home.

Sarah: It was very complicated because you start off getting the first step done. Then you get a packet in the mail and you get all these lists of things you have to come up with. You have to sign up for classes and take certification courses. We just took it one step at a time, which is all we could do. All the while just knowing whom we were doing it for. The process got very long and it was very challenging at times. Especially when you're not hearing anything back and things are delayed. It's easy to feel agony and it adds time to this process. Knowing your daughter is in an orphanage overseas and she's not with her family, is hard. We just did everything in our power to push things as fast as we could on our side. When you're sending things off and waiting, you just have to hope that other people getting it are going to process it and get it through quickly.

Jeremy: We just looked at our finances, and we re-financed our house we did some fundraisers. As well as some auctions on Facebook. Social media is a great way to raise money when you have that goal and you have that child that's waiting for you. It's a good motivation to be able to put one foot in front of the other and get it done. Waiting absolutely is the hard part, but that is something you can't control

Gerald: Sarah explains how love and authenticity has changed her life and her families' life.

Sarah: The more people see these children and the need that they have, they want to help. They want to help these children come home. I think a part of what we want to do is share this story. It goes hand in hand with many others that we know. These children are worth any cost it takes to get them into your home. There are so many children that are just abandoned because they are not born perfect. Many people just have these expectations for what they want, and they want this perfect looking life. We know that there is no perfect life and there's no perfect people, so really the most important thing is just seeing people and loving people. For us, we just want to share our story so people will open up their hearts and just ask themselves, "Can we help someone adopt these kids? Could we adopt those kids? Could we make room in our families for one more?" It's really life changing, and it has changed our family for the better. I love that our boys had this experience, we had a lot of conversations while we were waiting for her to come home. Being able to see them along side her and love her and help her and understand that all people are created uniquely and differently. We all have special needs, and we all have different abilities. We don't need to label and say someone doesn't deserve our best and our effort. That's really the main point we want to convey. Whenever you give of yourself and you love people and you show your kids that example, hopefully they, too, will grow up and have that appreciation that all life has dignity. May they, too, someday adopt because there is such a need for it. There are so many kids that need a home, every parent should experience adoption, it is incredible find a child that needs a mom and be there for them. Maria and I felt bonded right away.

Jeremy: It felt like she was a part of our family for so much longer than that. When we brought her home, it felt surreal, but it also felt very natural. The first time I saw her, I felt like she was already our daughter. She integrated in with her brothers without missing a beat, it was just a rather joyous occasion. I think those are the experiences that I will look back fondly at for the rest of my life. Usually it's the man who is dragging his feet a little bit, or really can't see why you're doing it. But I can tell you from the personal experience that I've had, and the experience of many men that I know with a child with a disability, that it is a wonderful, wonderful way to grow your family. As men we have a responsibility to be protectors and providers. I really believe that with all of the children out there that don't have men in their life, we have a great opportunity and for us to be that for somebody. It is important to be a dad in this world to our own biological kids and also to kids that aren't as fortunate to grow up in their family. For men who are on the fence and who maybe are not feeling that emotional draw to do it, I would just tell them to take that leap of faith and you won't be sorry that you did.

Gerald: Encouragement to follow your prompting to adopt is really the first and most important step.

Sarah: Deep in your heart know that you want to adopt and you can do it. There's going to be lots of doubts that will creep in, I think a lot of people can listen to those doubts and walk away from it. I could have seen Maria's picture and it could have been like every other time prior to that, where it wasn't the right time perhaps. But if you're being drawn toward adoption, surround yourself with those who have adopted. Talk to people about the resources that are available, there's so many people out there who can give you resources and encouragement to point you in the right direction. To give you a push, no matter how you adopt if you're adopting someone you have seen before or you're trusting on an agency to match you, the reality is, they are children. They are waiting for a family. They don't have the choice; they were born into a situation out of their control. These children don't have any ability to get out of that situation. The most important thing that we can do with our life is say, "I'm here for you, I'm not leaving you." That's what family is, whether they are yours biologically, or are a child they adopted. When they are your family, they become a permanent part, and that's lovely.

Jeremy: We are adopted into God's family; we have a lot of blessings in our life that we don't deserve. To be able to give that back to somebody else isn't heroic, it's a part of our duty. I think for people who may be pregnant with a child who has a diagnosis, there are a lot more resources out there than you know.

Thanks for listening to his episode. Orange Socks is an initiative of Rise Services Incorporated a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for people with disabilities. Follow Orange socks on Facebook and Instagram, and visit our website [orangesocks.org](http://orangesocks.org) for more stories and to find national and local resources to help parents of children with disabilities.