

We are Robert and Shelley Bedford. We met and got married in 2004. At the time, Shelley had 2 children, Jakob and Olivia, from a previous marriage, so we discussed the possibility of growing our family early on in our relationship. Robert was adopted, so the possibility of adoption was mentioned almost immediately. Our “plan” was to get married, have a child together and then look into adoption. Our daughter, Zoie, was born in September 2005. In December 2005, Robert’s mother died, leaving behind an inheritance check for each of her children. We received the money in the fall of 2006 and discussed the possibility of using that money to adopt a child in memory of his mother.

On December 23, 2006, Shelley began searching adoption agencies to gather information about international adoption. After realizing that each agency had a separate section for “special needs children”, she began searching these sections specifically. Her thoughts immediately turned to her Aunt Pam (who’s story you can read on their blog at <http://www.only1mom.com/2012/07/2012-update-she-was-born-on-4th-of-july.html> ). On a whim, she typed “Down syndrome adoption” into google...and the result changed her life. The website that Shelley found is [www.reecesrainbow.org](http://www.reecesrainbow.org), which is a non profit organization that advocates for the international adoption of children with Down syndrome. At the time, there were very few children listed on RR. Shelley emailed the director, shared her desire to adopt a little boy between the age of 3-5 and asked if there were any waiting children with Down syndrome that fit those parameters. On Christmas Eve 2006, she opened an email and saw the very first photo of a little boy on the other side of the world. Realizing that this was what God had been leading her too, Shelley went to Robert and asked for his thoughts on adopting a child with Ds. Until this point, they had never discussed a child with special needs. Robert asked for a couple of days to think about it and by the end of 2006, the couple had decided that they would pursue the adoption of a child with Down syndrome.

In January 2007, Robert and Shelley made an official commitment to adopt the little boy in the photos that Shelley saw. They started the home study and adoption dossier paper work, knowing nothing more than they were going to travel half way around the world to the country of Ukraine to adopt a little boy with Down syndrome and unrepaired clubbed feet. In July 2007, they arrived in Ukraine and their eyes were opened to the plight of children with Down syndrome all over the world. They met their soon to be 4 year old son....16 pounds, wearing 9 month clothes, drinking out of a bottle and no comprehension of how to play with toys or do anything other than sit in a crib all day. They resolved to bring him home to the US and their family and to provide him with the medical care, therapy and everything that he needed in order to grow and thrive in their family. Their son, Xander, arrived in the US on August 22, 2007, just 4 days before his 4<sup>th</sup> birthday.

After seeing what happens to children with Down syndrome once they are left in orphanages, the Bedford family knew that they could do more. In January 2008, they committed to go back to Eastern Europe, this time to the country of Serbia, to attempt to adopt a 4 year old boy with Down syndrome. At the time, this had never been done. On April 14, 2008, their son, Grifyn, became the first child with Down syndrome to ever be

adopted in the country of Serbia. Many others followed after him and Serbia continues to process the adoption of children with Ds to this day.

Shelley went on to do advocacy work with Reeces Rainbow and to assist other families in their adoption journeys. The family continued to support orphan ministries, with their focus on children with Down syndrome.

In 2009, they started their 3<sup>rd</sup> adoption process, this time from the country of Bulgaria. In April 2010, Shelley traveled to Bulgaria and brought home their then 7 year old son, Kullen, who also has Down syndrome and had been living in a mental institution since shortly after his 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

While visiting Kullen, Shelley saw a precious little girl with Down syndrome that had just been transferred to the institution. Working with her agency, they were able to locate the little girl's adoption file. Shelley had hoped to be able to help find a family for the little girl. Instead, she quickly realized that her family was supposed to go back for this little one instead. So, in 2011, the Bedford family started their 4<sup>th</sup> international adoption of a child with Down syndrome and their daughter, Annikah, arrived home in the US in December 2011. Annikah has Down syndrome and Moyamoya Disease.

In December 2011, shortly after Annikah arrived home, the Bedfords were providing respite care for a 9 year old boy with Down syndrome who'd been adopted the previous year from Bulgaria by another family. The family asked Robert and Shelley to adopt this little boy into their family. Their son, Emmett, became their 5<sup>th</sup> child with Down syndrome.

You can read more about their family and their children with Down syndrome on their blog: [www.only1mom.com](http://www.only1mom.com)

