

New Life in U.S. in Doubt for 2 Disabled Orphans

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Gabriel, a 4-year-old Russian boy with Down Syndrome, can count in English the days before he is scheduled to join the American couple he calls mama and papa. He does not know that his adoption might never happen, thanks to a political tit-for-tat between Moscow and Washington.

Gabriel thinks he will soon fly to Idaho with Rebecca and Brian Preece, but the courts have halted the process. President Vladimir Putin says Russian children should be brought up in Russia, as a matter of pride.

A new law stopping adoptions by Americans, which came into effect Jan. 1, too late to stop Gabriel's, the Preeces thought, was in response to U.S. legislation intended to punish Russians accused of violating human rights.

"We have his clothes all laid out on the bed upstairs that we were going to dress him in to pick

him up, his little snow boots and his snow suit and his 12 layers of clothing to stay warm," says Rebecca Preece, her eyes brimming with tears.

"We talked about going for a car ride today and then getting on an airplane together," says the 34-year-old American from Boise, the Idaho capital, sitting in the lobby of a Moscow hotel with husband Brian.

The couple, who had carried out the legal procedures to adopt Gabriel, were on their way to court Tuesday when they were told that their case was on hold.

"We were told the judge received something from the Supreme Court yesterday telling her not to sign the final decree until further instruction," Rebecca Preece said.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, was quoted as saying in late December that six children whose adoptions had been approved by courts would be able to go to the United States, while those whose cases were still pending would stay.

The Preeces, who own a fireplace business, were thought to be among the first group. Another couple, the Bonners, also thought they would soon be able to take home 5-year-old Jaymi, who also has Down Syndrome. Their case was frozen as well.

"It seems that we are almost just numbers that are thrown out," said Jeana Bonner, who is bringing up two daughters in Salt Lake City, Utah, with her accountant husband.

"We just want to show that the children that we have grown to love, and all of the orphans here. They are not numbers, they're children. They love and deserve to be loved, and there are families that can provide that for them."

The two couples, who did not know each other before, have their own biological children at home. Both have a child with Down Syndrome.

More than 650,000 children are considered orphans in Russia, and 110,000 of them lived in state institutions in 2011, official data shows. There were about 7,400 adoptions by Russian families in 2011, compared with 3,400 adoptions by families abroad.

American families adopt more Russian children than those of any other country, with more than 60,000 cases since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, including 962 in 2011.

Tens of thousands of people protested against the law in Moscow on Sunday, saying vulnerable children were being used as pawns in a political battle.

"Legally, he's our child and he's stuck. He is a political hostage," Brian Preece said, regarding Gabriel. "They are not political pawns, they are kids. They need moms, they need dads, they need brothers and sisters," he said.

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