

An Orange Socks Sibling Story: Corinne- Down syndrome

Interview by: Gerald Nebeker, President of Orange Socks

Gerald: 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 Corinne about her younger sister Vanessa who has Down syndrome. I know you're going to enjoy hearing her story.

Gerald: So Corinne thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me about your sister Vanessa. How much younger is Vanessa than you?

Corinne: Three years.

Gerald: Three years do you remember when she was born?

Corinne: No I don't.

Gerald: When did you first realize that Vanessa had Down syndrome?

Corinne: Growing up I was always just told that she had Down syndrome but she was always just my sister so it never really made a difference I guess.

Gerald: Okay so you had friends over what did your friends think of your sister Vanessa?

Corinne: They also kind of grew up with her. so a lot of them were aware but the ones who weren't aware would sometimes ask "what's wrong with your little sister?". And it was always coming from a good place it was never meant to be hurtful or anything.

Gerald: So nobody ever teased you about having a sister with Down syndrome?

Corinne: No.

Gerald: So that's great. Some siblings experience what's called 'the glass child syndrome'. Which means that the needs of the siblings with the disability are so great that the parents actually look through the other children and care of that person with the disability. Did you ever feel like that happened to you? That some of your needs were not met because your parents were having to work with your sibling with a disability?

Corinne: Occasionally.

Gerald: So what was that like? Do you want to describe that?

Corinne: It was just normal. I felt like that was kind of my role as her older sister was to just let myself be ignored a little bit and I felt bad wanting that attention almost like she needed it more.

Gerald: And you two you were telling me earlier that you two used to fight a lot.

Corinne: Yes moving away was the best thing I've ever done for our relationship anyway.

Gerald: So moving away helped your relationship with your sister because you just fought like sisters.

Corinne: Yeah she's just a sister.

Gerald: So if you were to give advice to someone in your position that just found out that they had a sister or a brother with a disability, I guess talking sibling to sibling what advice would you give somebody with a disability?

Corinne: Don't take it personally.

Gerald: Do you want to explain that a little bit?

Corinne: When it's the 80th time wearing the skirt that you've told her not to wear because she stretches it out because she is bigger than you are, just don't take it personally.

Gerald: Oh you mean your skirt that she's borrowed?

Corinne: Yes there's been lots of different things also try not to take it personally. When your parents do ignore you because your little sibling has more needs than you. And that's what it is, I think that's really what it is. She has more needs than I do and that's fine.

Gerald: Very good what are some of the challenges that you've experienced in having a sibling with disabilities?

Corinne: I think the hardest one is feeling like I need to protect her from a world where everyone is so harsh and so rude to each other. And knowing that there is really not that much that I can do to protect her, I think that is the hardest thing about being her older sister.

Gerald: How about the joys?

Corinne: Oh there's so many when I call her and I haven't talked to her in a few days its like I'm the most important thing in the entire world to her. She gives you one hundred percent of her attention when you haven't seen her for a while.

Gerald: That's great.

Corinne: It's really nice. Even growing up I would walk around and people would look at us and I would just beam with pride because I loved having a little sister with Down syndrome.

Gerald: After the interview as I chatted with her, Corinne mentioned how having a sister with Down syndrome helped her be a kinder more accepting person and how that impact was also reflected in Corinne's other siblings.

Gerald: Thanks for listening to this episode. Orange Socks is an initiative of Rise Incorporated, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for people with disabilities. Follow Orange Socks on Facebook and Instagram, and visit our website orangesocks.org for more stories, and to find national and local resources to help parents of children with disabilities.