

ALUMNI FEATURE

SCOTT SHARMAN

"Pastor Scott," one of the characters in "Miracles from Heaven, a book on the New York Times Bestseller List and a current popular movie of the same name, is Wayland graduate Dr. Scott Sharman, founding pastor of Alsbury Baptist Church in Burleson, Texas.

Sharman came to Wayland solely on the recommendation of his pastor at Hoffmantown Baptist Church in Albuquerque. "My first visit to the campus was the day I moved into McDonald Hall," he says. He majored in sociology and minored in religion, graduating in 1978. He founded the suburban Fort Worth church 21 years ago.

"Miracles from Heaven" is based on the story of Annabelle Beam who suffered from pseudo-obstruction motility disorder, a severe intestinal disease, but was healed after falling into the rotted-out core of a tree in 2008 at age nine.

Anna – as she prefers to be called – is the middle daughter of Kevin and Christy Beam who have been members of Sharman's church for several years. The family, which includes sisters Abby and Adelynn, lives in a rural area between Burleson and Alvarado where Beam is a veterinarian and also runs cattle. His wife is a homemaker.

At age 5, Anna began to suffer severe abdominal pains and had emergency surgery at Cook Children's Hospital in Fort Worth. She was referred to Dr. Samuel Nurko, a world-renowned surgeon at Children's Hospital in Boston. She was put on 10 different medications and had a feeding tube in her nose but the doctor said there was no cure, only treatment options.

"She would go to Boston about every six weeks and have to stay two or three weeks," said Sharman.

One windy day when she was nine, she and her older sister were climbing a big cottonwood tree in their backyard when one of the limbs began to crack. They scooted back toward the trunk and Anna fell about 30 feet down the core of the tree.

Paramedics were called and had to get a tall ladder to see down into the trunk. After several hours, they were able to hoist the child out by a rope tied around her waist. She was airlifted to Cook Children's Hospital but had no internal injuries or broken bones, just a few scrapes.

As Sharman relates, "A few days later the family was going out of town and Annabelle (as he calls her) told her mom, 'I'm going to be OK.' Her mom asked, 'What do you mean?' and she said, 'When I was in the tree, I went to heaven.' Christy had no idea what to do with that.

"But when Annabelle was taken to appointments, she quit asking for pain medication and her stomach, which had been distended due to medication, was back to normal. After several weeks, they took her off all medication and she was never sick again," Sharman continued.

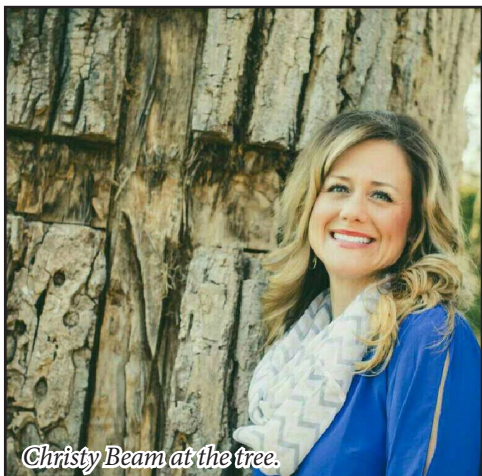
"She is very matter of fact that she died and went to heaven. She said she didn't want to go back but God told her she needed to go and added, 'You're going to be OK.'"



Scott Sharman at the remains of the tree.



Annabelle Beam with pet rabbit.



Christy Beam at the tree.

Sharman said the family spoke about the incident in church but Anna only talks about it if asked. Sharman added, "The family was not parading this story around."

Sharman says the book, written about a year ago and which mentions his church by name and refers to him as Dr. Scott Sharman rather than "Pastor Scott," is better than the movie, with which Sony Pictures took expected liberties for dramatic effect.

However, Sharman says, "I was very pleased with the movie. They took about four years of life and whittled it down to two hours. They show Kevin and Christy pretty overwhelmed about their daughter's illness and arguing about it. They never argued.

"They show Christy losing her faith and questioning God. She never questioned; she was rock solid in the whole journey. A couple of ladies tell her that her daughter's illness may be her fault because of unconfessed sin and

others said if she just had enough faith, God would make Annabelle well. That never happened in our church though someone else may have said that," Sharman explained.

"Kevin is a strong 'fix-it guy' who was an All-American quarterback at Hardin-Simmons and is in their Athletic Hall of Fame. He struggled watching his daughter being so sick. But the Beams were always in church, teaching Sunday school the whole time."

Sharman said his character – "a bald-headed guy older than me (John Carroll Lynch) who plays in 'The Walking Dead'" – gets 3 to 5 minutes in the movie. "I never did visit with him but the guy who plays the father (Martin Henderson) spent a weekend getting a feel for our church and Kevin's vet clinic."

While praising the cinematography of "Miracles from Heaven" as "right up there with 'War Room' (another popular Christian-based film), Sharman said Alsbury is "never mentioned by name and is depicted as an old traditional church, kind of like the Methodist church I grew up in. But we meet a gym for worship and (contemporary group) Third Day did the music for the movie."

Sharman said that while God is mentioned frequently in the movie, Jesus is not. "I would love to have seen Jesus mentioned. But I met the producer, a dynamic young Christian who also did 'Heaven is for Real.' (TV evangelist) T.D. Jakes of Dallas is one of his biggest supporters."

Sharman and his staff were invited to the world premiere of the movie in Dallas and his church booked a theater for opening weekend, selling out all 298 seats, and also had a book-signing event for Mrs. Beam. He said proceeds from the book will help the family pay enormous medical bills. "The movie shows Kevin selling his Harley to help pay bills and that actually happened."

Sharman said the Beam family "has never wanted to come across as capitalizing on Annabelle's story or pushing an agenda. They just told the story as it happened. A lot of people prayed for that little girl for a long time. Dr. Nurko, a very compassionate man who treated her said "your daughter is well, her motility is gone and this is not something kids typically get well from."

Anna is now a seventh grader in nearby Joshua and "full of life," Sharman says.

Kevin Beam trimmed up the branches on the tree into which his daughter fell but left the trunk. "He just couldn't cut it down and carved a cross into the side of it," said Sharman.

Acknowledging that some people are still skeptical of the story, Sharman said, "I would probably be skeptical too if I didn't know the family. Annabelle Beam was as sick as any child I have ever seen and she is well today after falling into that tree. Like the man healed by Jesus said, 'All I know is once I was blind but now I can see.'"



Annabelle and Christy Beam