

*Book tells story of 4-year-old's
near-death experience*



By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

When the Burpo family of Imperial was going through son Colton's burst appendix and near death in 2003, little did they know seven years later the positives that would come out of it.

One is the recent publishing of their story titled, "Heaven is for Real."

Written in Todd Burpo's first-person narrative, the 150-page book tells of son Colton's near-death experience when he slipped from consciousness during surgery and then, over a period of time, begins telling his parents of his visit to heaven.

In an interview this week, Todd Burpo said he has no doubt his son made the heavenly visit. While Todd, pastor of Imperial's Crossroads Wesleyan Church, says he and wife Sonja originally weren't sure about it, he is now.

"I am 100% convinced he was in heaven," he said.

Todd said they were caught off guard at first, when their 4-year-old started making comments that were too accurate about heaven, and what he saw there, to be created by an imaginative child.

Like when they were driving through North Platte about four months after the surgery Colton underwent at Great Plains Regional Medical Center.

Colton was asked if he remembered the hospital. He answered, "Yes, that's where the angels sang to me."

Todd said that was just the beginning of things that made them realize over a two-year period that young Colton really did have a near-death experience and spent some time in heaven.

Others clues included:

1) Accurate descriptions of seeing his mom and dad in separate rooms, praying for their son, at the hospital while Colton was in surgery.

2) Accurate Biblical information that he had not yet been exposed to in Sunday School, including meeting John the Baptist and knowing he was Jesus' cousin, and descriptions of Jesus' eyes.

3) Colton's meeting of his great grandfather, "Pop" in heaven, who died in the 1970s when Todd was 7 years old. Colton said people in heaven were all young, and knew it was "Pop" when he saw a younger picture of him, but did not recognize Pop's picture as an older man.

4) The "bombshell," as Todd calls it, when Colton described meeting his sister in heaven. His parents had never discussed with Colton that Sonja had a miscarriage in 1998, about a year before Colton was born.

Looking back, Todd now realizes there were things Colton was saying even while in the hospital.

"He was trying to tell me in the hospital, but I wouldn't listen," Todd said.

As he states in the epilogue, writing this book was never something they had planned, but that God had a hand in it.

"I didn't feel comfortable writing a book and it was hard for us to think people would want to read it," he said.

"God made me do it," he smiled.

He believes God had a part in the encouragement they had from a pastor friend to write the book. That friend, Phil McCallum, made some introductions and got them to the right people, Todd said.

It eventually led to the book deal with Thomas Nelson of Nashville, a 200-year-old company that publishes a lot of Christian books.

He worked with author Lynn Vincent, who most recently collaborated with Sarah Palin on her book, "Going Rogue: An American Life."

Todd first began writing last December, turning in the manuscript in March. Then, for several months, he worked with Vincent, "who played a big part in putting my words down on paper," he said.

The book's official publication date is Nov. 2, but it is already in its third printing, according to the company's acquisitions editor, Debbie Wickwire.

The first printing produced 40,000 paperback copies.

The book has already been translated into Spanish, with plans for additional translations in Swedish, German and Russian, according to Burpo.

Oasis has also contracted to release an audio book.

Wickwire said Thomas Nelson wanted to publish "Heaven is for Real" simply because "it's an amazing story told by honest, believable people who have no agenda."

There was also another reason, which confirmed their decision, she said.

In 2006, Thomas Nelson published a book by child prodigy and artist Akiane Kramarik, titled, "Akiane: Her Art, Her Poetry, Her Life," that included, at the young age of eight, her painting of Jesus.

In Burpo's book, they tell of Colton seeing Akiane's picture of Jesus, which they were able to pull up on the Internet.

He told his dad that, unlike numerous other paintings and pictures of Jesus he'd been shown, this one by Akiane looked like the Jesus he saw in heaven.

"That was the additional confirmation we needed as a company that this was indeed a true story and that we were to publish it," Wickwire said.

The book is currently on sale at The Attic in Champion, but Burpo said it will also be available later at The Imperial Republican.

It's also available in all general market and Christian book stores, and some Walmarts, as well as most major online resources such as Amazon.com, ChristianBook.com and BarnesandNoble.com.

Book signing Saturday

The publisher has scheduled a book signing for Burpo in downtown McCook this Saturday, Oct. 30, at New Life Christian Books and Gifts, which is selling "Heaven is for Real."

The event is scheduled from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. CT.