

“Heaven is for Real” movie due to be released Easter week

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Clips from the “Heaven is for Real” movie that Todd Burpo has seen represent the area “very positively.”

Burpo, who along with co-author Lynn Vincent, wrote the New York Times #1 best-selling book about his son Colton’s heavenly experience, said that makes him breathe a little easier.

“How Imperial is presented is very positive. It makes our way of life here desirable,” he said.

Excitement is building for the release of the movie based on Burpo’s book published three years ago. Sales of the original book are nearing eight million copies.

“Heaven is for Real,” the movie, will be in theatres Wednesday, April 16, 2014, during Easter week.

The film’s trailer, those short clips shown in theatres before the featured movie, was released last week and is also getting rave reviews.

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“People who looked at the trailer are saying ‘Wow,’” Burpo said Tuesday.

People can view the trailer at: movies.yahoo.com/video/heaven-real-trailer

The two minute, 45-second trailer begins with young Colton’s question to his mother, “Did you know I have a sister?”

That question and some further revelations from four-year-old Colton started the family wondering about his near-death experience in 2003.

At that time, urging from several sources including God, Burpo said, led him to write the book. He experienced some of the same urgings to proceed with a movie.

But, he still had worries.

“How do you take something so sacred to you and trust Hollywood?” he asked.

“The biggest step of faith I’ve had was to work with Hollywood. The easiest thing we could have done was not to make the movie,” he said.

But his concerns have been relieved.

So far, in what he’s seen and getting to meet some of the people working on the movie, Burpo believes it’s going to be as representative as possible in telling their story.

Burpo spent time on the set during the process, and added, “It’s been nice to work with people,

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regardless of their faith backgrounds, who were willing to tell the story the way Colton wanted it told.”

There are some big names involved in the TriStar Pictures’ effort. One is the director, Randall Wallace.

Top films Wallace has directed include “We Were Soldiers,” “Secretariat” and “The Man in the Iron Mask.” Also a screenwriter, he wrote the screenplay for the 1995 film “Braveheart.”

Cinematographer Dean Semler for “Heaven is for Real” won an Academy Award for “Dances with Wolves.”

Then, there’s the cast.

Playing Burpo is Greg Kinnear, probably best known for his role in “As Good as it Gets.” He’s also starred in “Little Miss Sunshine,” “I Don’t Know How She Does It” and “Auto Focus.”

Kinnear has a brother who works for the Billy Graham association, and is a Christian, too, Burpo noted. But, it was Kinnear’s wife and child who urged him to do “Heaven is for Real” after they read the book.

Kelly Reilly plays Sonja Burpo. She’s had acting parts in “Sherlock Holmes” and “Flight.”

Connor Corum, a youngster from Ohio, is making his film debut in “Heaven is for Real” as young Colton.

Burpo said the family has had the chance to meet Kinnear, Reilly and young Corum in person over the course of the filming.

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Both Kinnear and Reilly wanted their roles to reflect what happened “as true to life and believable as they could,” Burpo said.

When people in this area do see the movie, which was filmed in Winnipeg, Canada, they will notice that everything from the book could not be represented literally.

While the Burpo family names are used, as well as the town Imperial and even the newspaper, Imperial Republican, are referred to by name, other names will be different, due to legal reasons, he said.

Some characters are created and others are compilations of several people in their story, he said.

And, as Hollywood goes, conflicts have to be created as well as some of the conversations. But even with all that, Burpo said the representation is good from what he’s seen.

The movie has already had some unannounced “screenings,” he said, and he’s been told by the TriStar people response has been better than expected.

He expects they will get to see the full length movie themselves the end of this month or early December.

It’s too far off to know if Imperial will be able to show the film the week it’s released, he added.

While the family has faced some rejection of their story, which they expect to come with the movie’s release, too, Burpo said their story is true.

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“For us, this is what happened. If they don’t accept it that doesn’t change the past. But if they do, it could change their future,” he said.

Book continues to sell

In addition to nearly eight million copies sold of the original “Heaven is for Real” book, when adding the children’s book “Heaven is for Real for Kids,” and the devotional book, “Heaven is So Real!”, copies sold are nearing 10 million, he said.

In addition, the original book has been licensed for print in 36 languages, the kids’ book in 16 and the devotional in about 10 languages, he added.

A hard-page book, “Heaven is for Real for Little Ones,” designed for younger children (so pages can’t be torn) was released in May, and has already sold 80,000 copies. There is also an app people can acquire that has Colton reading the children’s book.