

**Madison Meienburg (Grade 9: Liberty Center Schools, Liberty Center, OH)**

**Level III Honorable Finalist**

**Letter to author Todd Burpo concerning his book, *Heaven is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back***

Dear Todd Burpo:

Heaven: a place often traditionally depicted as being above the sky and regarded in various religions as the abode of God and His angels, and of where the good go after they die. It's a place where you can't magically type the address in your GPS and expect directions. You have to earn your way there. Not many people will be able to go there after they die, and very few people will be able to experience Heaven, and come back to Earth. God knew that if he let Colton experience Heaven, that he would come back, and share his story. This little man's voice has the power to change people's beliefs. As you and Colton share his trip to Heaven and back, you share a story that could change how people look at religion. You have changed non-believers into believers, and you continuously do so with the overwhelming proof of God that your little boy was able to provide.

"That's where the angels sang to me." This is my absolute favorite line in the book. You did not really expect it. Once I read this line, I was craving more. I had goosebumps. Hearing a young boy saying that he heard the angels sing to him at the hospital is not something that you can just forget; it makes the reader want to know more. At first, you have your doubts. You may just think that he could just be dreaming about this, but then you realize that this isn't something that he could make up. There was no doubt in my mind that Tod spoke the truth when he described seeing his own grandpa (who was a young man once again), or seeing his sister, who had died of a miscarriage in the womb.

A few years ago, everything was great; we went to church every Sunday and our family was very close, until one Sunday morning. On that particular morning, I woke up and checked the time; it was almost eleven in the morning. I jerked out of my bed and ran into the living room. My parents were sitting on the couch. I told them that church had already started and that we were late. They told me that we just weren't going today. I thought it would be okay if we missed just one church service, until the next week rolled by. The same thing happened again. Every week this happened. I continued going to Catechism and the Wednesday services (my grandma knew that my parents weren't going, so she drove me). Our Catechism classes then ended, and the next year came by fast. It was my 3<sup>rd</sup> year in Catechism. I started going again as usual. I went for half a year, then didn't go again. My parents still weren't going to church either. It came to the day where I finally asked my mom why we weren't going anymore. She told me that my grandma was saying things to our pastor about my family. My mom is divorced, but got remarried to another man. He and I got along very well, but my grandma didn't like him at all. I didn't know why she didn't like him, but my grandma would say things to our pastor about our family life. She made it seem like we were living in a bad home with him. My mom and grandma didn't talk for a while because of that. My friends asked me why I wasn't going to Catechism anymore, and I was embarrassed to tell them why. A year later, I was seeing all my friends getting confirmed. I knew I could have been with them to get confirmed too, but I wasn't.

My freshman year was finally here, and I was excited that I was finally in high school. It was the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter when I heard my friends talking about taking some other friends to church with them on Wednesdays. I was sitting there with them, just hoping that one of them would ask me. Sure enough, they did, and I gladly said that I would come. I was a little scared because I didn't know how it would be. Since I haven't been to my own church in a while, I was scared if I would get asked questions that I didn't know the answers to. They told me I would be fine and I would have a ton of fun. With that said, I went.

It was Wednesday night, and my friend picked me up to take me to church with them since I didn't have a ride. It was cold and dark outside, but with a clear sky that made all the stars shine bright. We pulled into the church's parking lot and walked inside. This church was foreign to me, so I had no idea where to go. I was led to the sanctuary of the church. We were the first people there, so when the rest of my friends walked in, I greeted them with a big smile on my face. I was in such a great mood knowing that I was finally back in church, learning about God once again. The rest of the night went great and it was a lot of fun.

I stated reading your book, and realized that good things can come from tragedies. Colton's appendix ruptured, but if that didn't happen he wouldn't have experienced his trip to Heaven and back. I experienced a tragedy of my own when my family stopped going to church. If that wouldn't have happened, I never would have gone to that different church with my friends and learned more about God in a fun and exciting way. Your book inspired me. Not only do I know that good things come out of tragedies, but I also found more proof that *Heaven is for Real*.

Sincerely,

**Madison Meienburg**