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March 8, 2005

Posted: 3/8/05

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Associated Baptist Press

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (ABP)—Five years after paying for the right to make a movie about the Columbine massacre, the North American Mission Board has nothing to show for its investment.

The movie about Christian student Cassie Bernall, one of 13 killed in the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, was supposed to be the first feature-length movie for theatrical or television release for NAMB, the Southern Baptist Convention's evangelism and church-starting agency.

But the movie rights, which reportedly cost NAMB \$20,000, expired in 2002 without the movie starting production.

"We bought the rights to the movie, had two years to make it, and came very close to funding that would have done the story justice," NAMB

spokesman Martin King said. "Our folks felt it was a tremendous opportunity to tell a story. It just didn't come together."

Meanwhile, the Bernall family has been unable to get the movie project off the ground. "When it didn't pan out with the North American Mission Board, it didn't pan out anywhere," said Misty Bernall of Littleton, Colo., mother of the slain teenager and author of *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*, the book that would have been the basis for the movie.

The book is based on initial reports of the 1999 mass shooting, which indicated Cassie Bernall said "yes" when asked by her killer if she believed in God. Misty Bernall's book focuses on her daughter's transformation, in the months prior to the shooting, from teenage rebellion and occult involvement to a commitment to Jesus Christ.

Bernall said the expired movie rights reverted back to the book publisher, Plough Publishing House, which since has gone out of business. The family has been in negotiation with Plough's successor, the Bruderhof Foundation, for a year and a half but has been unable to work out an agreement.

"We'd love to get the rights back to Cassie's book so we could do something else with it," she said. But, she added, the family has given up on a movie.

"We were very disappointed," Bernall said, when the NAMB movie didn't materialize. They agreed to the movie proposal because of a personal relationship with NAMB chief counsel Randy Singer, she said. "We love Randy Singer. We were very comfortable with him handling it."

Misty Bernall and husband Brad spoke to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting two months after the shooting as part of the NAMB report. The movie deal was signed eight months later.

A NAMB spokesman acknowledged the movie's potential suffered when an

investigation revealed Cassie Bernall likely was not the student who said “yes” to killer Dylan Klebold. Although the account was widely circulated for months after the tragedy, investigators determined the student was likely Valeen Schnurr, who survived the shooting despite being wounded more than a dozen times.

“I understand that impacted some of the ability to get some of the funding” for the movie, spokesman King said. “The longer it went, the less sure we were that that story would be marketable.”

The movie deal was a departure for the SBC evangelism agency, but President Robert Reccord told NAMB trustees at the time that Cassie Bernall’s story would serve as a powerful witness of the life-changing power of Christ.

NAMB has a television subsidiary, the Broadcast Communications Group in Fort Worth, Texas, but the group was not involved in the negotiations or production.

“We still feel like it was a good opportunity,” King said recently. “It was getting outside the box but not outside our ministry assignment. ... We wish everything that we tried worked out.”

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