

'Soul Surfer' Tells Teen's Faith Story

Soul Surfer—the inspirational life story of surfer Bethany Hamilton, the Christian teen who had her left arm bitten off by a tiger shark—will open in more than 2,000 theaters tomorrow, April 8, across the country and in Canada.

Heavily marketed to the faith-based community, *Soul Surfer* stars AnnaSophia Robb as Bethany; Dennis Quaid as her father, Tom; Helen Hunt as Bethany's mother, Cheri; and Carrie Underwood as church youth leader Sarah Hill.

Rated PG for an intense accident sequence and some thematic material, the film has received some positive early reviews. The *Orlando Sentinel* noted that *Soul Surfer* is "the best faith-based film ever made, an uplifting, entertaining and wonderfully-acted. ... The religious subtext is handled as lightly as you'd expect in a movie about surfers. Bethany's faith gives her stoicism and resolve in the face of a calamity, alters her priorities and gives her purpose."

Variety observed that the family-friendly film "keeps its balance" and is "a kind-hearted coming-of-age drama with killer waves."

Bethany and her parents wanted the story told their way, the *Toronto Sun* reported. "Definitely my family and I stood firm in what we wanted in the film—definitely our faith in Jesus Christ," she told the newspaper. "It actually is a lot better than I'd even hoped for. We were scared, you never know what Hollywood's going to do when they get a true story."

Now 21, Bethany—who has become a top-performing pro surfer despite her October 2003 injuries—was a stunt double for all of the one-arm surfing in the movie, which was filmed on location in Hawaii, where she and her family live.

The film is based on her *Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family, and Fighting to Get Back on the Board* (MTV Books), which was sold in some Christian bookstores.

Several Christian-themed products are tied to the movie, including *Soul Surfer: Movie Edition* (MTV Books) and *Devotions for the Soul Surfer* (Thomas Nelson). Zondervan has published *Rise Above: A 90-Day Devotional*, *Soul Surfer Bible* and *Ask Bethany: FAQs: Surfing, Faith and Friends*.

Church resource organization Outreach has released four products, including *Soul Surfer Church Kit*; *Soul Surfer DVD Study*; *Soul Surfer Study Guide*; and *Soul Surfer: Catching God's Wave for Your Life*—a nonfiction book for preteens and teens. In June, Regal Books is publishing *Raising a Soul Surfer* by Cheri Hamilton—Bethany's mother.

Two Christian chains have promotions tied to the film's release. LifeWay Christian Stores is offering coupons for a \$10 ticket to see the film or a \$5 concession-stand voucher in DVDs it promotes in two separate emailings. Mardel is also offering the \$10 movie ticket. Berean Christian Stores spotlights the *Soul Surfer* release, encouraging shoppers to "ride the wave with Bethany." The chain also features several movie tie-in products.