DO YOU believe IN MIRACLES?

The Beam family does—and so do nearly 80 percent of Americans.
I t seemed impossible. But the emer-
gency room doctors were telling Christy and Kevin Beam that their 9-year-old daughter Annabel wasn’t hurt.

Annabel, who had tumbled head-
first 30 feet to the bottom of a hollow cottonwood tree on the family’s farm in Burleson, Texas, had no head injuries, no brain damage and no spinal trauma, the doctors said. No broken bones or internal injuries—only a few minor bumps and bruises. A concussion, at most.

Annabel had spent several hours inside the tree, most of that time unresponsive, doctors said. More religious Americans believe than the nonreligious, most beautiful, but the unexplainable—Christy still say miracles are possible. In fact, belief in miracles is on the rise, according to best-
selling author Marianne Williamson, known for her teachings on the Foundation for Inner Peace’s popular spiritual tome A Course in Miracles.

“People are evolving beyond strict adherence to a rationalistic worldview,” she says. “Quantum physics, spiritual understanding and a more holistic perspective in general have come together to produce a serious challenge to old-
paradigm, mechanistic thinking.” In other words: “People know there’s more going on in this life than just what the physical eyes can see.”

Kate Bowler, Ph.D., of Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C., and author of Blowing the Lonely Trumpet: A Reappraisal

Gospel, studies miracles and people who believe in them. She’s found that a very high percentage of religious people are convinced that God will make

targeted or often random choices because God will heal or bless one person over another. Many such people try to figure God will heal or bless one person over another. Many such people try to figure

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published last year—Imagining Heaven by John Burke and Touching Heaven by Chauncy Crandall, M.D.—each share stories of near-death experiences. In 2012, a trio of best-sellers (two by medical doctors) recounted miraculous (i.e., unexplainable) personal experiences. Eben Alexander’s Proof of Heaven tells how the neurosurgeon conversed with what he calls “the divine source of the universe” while in a coma caused by acute bacterial meningitis. Just when doctors were beginning to give up on him, his eyes popped open. Today, he’s completely healthy. Previously, the former Harvard Medical School faculty member believed near-death experiences were medically impossible.

In Dying to Be Me, Anita Moorjani says she learned life-changing spiritual truths while in a coma following a nearly four-year battle with cancer. Moorjani woke up—and was cancer-free when she left the hospital, just weeks after the day doctors told her family she would die.

While kayaking in southern Chile, orthopedic surgeon Mary C. Neal was pinned underwater for more than 15 minutes and drowned. Before she was resuscitated on the riverbank, she says she spoke with angels. In To Heaven and Back, she calls her accident “one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.”

One miraculous tale—The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven by Kevin and Alex Malarkey—turned out to be a hoax. Alex admitted he’d fabricated his experience after an auto accident that left him a quadriplegic at age 6 (but not before his and his father’s story was turned into a TV movie).

Doctors are often mystified by stories of unexpected recoveries, but not all are ready to declare them miracles. In fact, a current Yale study is looking at whether doctors of coma patients could have made mistaken prognoses. “We know that there are no true ‘miracles’ in medicine,” says David Greer, M.D., a neurologist at Yale–New Haven Hospital and one of the study’s main researchers, “but rather mistakes that are made by physicians who give an overly pessimistic prognosis.”

What Does It Mean?

The Beam family receives emails from people all over the world who think they’re perpetuating a hoax, and from others who say Annabel’s story inspired them to deepen their faith. As for the naysayers, “I don’t feel like I have anything to prove,” Christy says. “The proof is right there. We lived it. It’s not a gray area. It’s black and white.”

Adds Kevin, “The big question is, what does it mean since it did happen?” Some skeptics, he thinks, won’t believe the story no matter how convincing because it threatens their belief that God doesn’t exist. He’s hoping at least some of them will reconsider.

Yet Bowler stresses—and the Beams fully agree—that believing in miracles and in modern medicine don’t have to be mutually exclusive. “It’s never like faith versus science. It’s always faith and science,” Bowler says. “For the most part, people are throwing everything and the kitchen sink at problems, and when it works no one’s going to complain. Some way or another both medicine and miracles will get the credit. People love their doctors and they love their God, and they will ask both for a lot of favors.”

“Hope and faith can be abused,” Kevin says. “Even though deep down we knew something major had happened, we also didn’t want to just say, ‘Take all Annabel’s medicines and throw them away.’ Over the course of four years, we had a lot of people who gave us well-intentioned bad advice to just claim that she’s healed because God doesn’t want any of his children to be sick. We appreciated the miracle, but still respect the medical profession.

“I would hate for somebody to misinterpret that message and say, ‘Well, I’m just going to pull all my kids off their medications,’” says Kevin, a veterinarian, “I mean, this was our experience but we also realize that’s not going to be the case for every single person.”

Why was Annabel healed while countless others haven’t been? “It’s not that God loves her any more than he loves them. It’s not that our family has done anything to deserve a miracle,” Kevin reasons. “This whole experience is just so phenomenally humbling because I remember that desperation of being a parent who would do anything to see my child get better. We experienced that miracle, but I also realize that not everybody will—and those are questions I don’t have a good answer for.”

Mary C. Neal says she spoke with angels after drowning.

Do you believe in miracles? Visit Parade.com/miracles to take our mini survey.