

PROTECTED



By Scott Harris



Lukas and Emily in the third grade

From the third grade at Strafford (Mo.) Elementary School through their 2006 graduation from Strafford High, Lukas and Emily were just friends. As in, “Hi, how are you?” — end of conversation.

In 2007 Lukas joined the Army and was headed to Iraq in 2008.

“He came back from training before he was deployed,” Emily remembers. “I didn’t even realize I missed him until I saw him and ran up to him and gave him a big hug and said, ‘I missed you.’”

That was April. He left in May.

As 6,700 miles came between them, they burned through cell phone minutes and sent e-mails at every opportunity. They couldn’t wait for his deployment to end — for the opportunity to invite his Iraq buddies to what would surely be one of those all-day family weddings and receptions at Strafford First Assembly where he grew up.

Lukas and Emily Shook did marry on April 8 this year. But it was at the local courthouse, and their “honeymoon” was Lukas’ convalescent leave at his family’s home in Strafford. Their first months as husband and wife have revolved around his surgeries and extensive rehabilitation.

The change in their wedding plans came about because of what happened on Nov. 30, 2008.

SEVEN MINUTES

Pfc. (now Spc.) Lukas Shook was deployed to Iraq on May 22, 2008, with the 110th Military Police Company out of Fort Carson, Colo. They were assigned to protect the president, vice president and prime minister of Iraq. In the following months, Lukas became all too familiar with Baghdad’s threats as he spent many days in convoy transporting one or another government leader.

But the worst-case scenarios never materialized. After long days on duty, Lukas could return to base to phone Emily, read e-mails or enjoy opening a package from home.

“I didn’t care what was inside,” he says. “Just seeing her name written on the package made me feel better.”

On Nov. 30, a Sunday, there was no escort service. Lukas had finished eating breakfast and was walking across base when a 107 mm rocket hit.

“It landed about 10-15 meters behind me,” he says.

The explosion lifted Lukas through the air as pieces of shrapnel pierced him. The largest fragment blew a 3-inch-diameter hole completely through his body. Miraculously, the projectile went through his pelvis without breaking any bones or severing any major blood vessels.

Other fragments impacted Lukas’ lower spine, and the force of the explosion created instant and severe brain trauma.

Two soldiers quickly dragged Lukas to a bunker, but there was no transportation in sight to get him to a hospital. Then, out of nowhere, Loren Doole, an independent contractor, appeared. He had been driving by just as the rocket hit. Instead of seeking shelter, he jumped from his SUV and ran to the bunker where Lukas’ friends had taken him.

“I’m here to help,” he said.

In seven minutes Doole had driven Lukas to the base hospital. That life-saving time frame was just one of many events to follow that convince Lukas, Emily and their families of God’s faithfulness and protection.

“His wounds were so severe that he could have bled to death very easily,” says Dennis Shook, Lukas’ father.

“IT’S BETTER TO TRUST IN THE LORD ...”

Dennis had been visiting his own mother in the hospital much of the night and had caught just two hours of sleep when the call about Lukas came at 6 a.m. that Sunday. With Baghdad nine hours ahead of southwest Missouri, it was already mid-afternoon in Iraq. Doctors had treated Lukas as best they could and assessed his injuries.

“When the captain called us,” Dennis remembers, “it was like he couldn’t say ‘very’ enough times. He said, ‘Lukas Shook has been very, very, very seriously injured.’ Then they proceeded to tell me of his injuries.”

Dennis immediately called family, friends and fellow church members. Emily was first on his list.

“I can’t even describe it,” Emily says of that moment, trying to control the quaver in her voice. “It was like my heart sank. I get sad every time I think about it. I just didn’t know if he was going to die. His brothers and my roommate were at my house when I got the news. I had to tell his brothers.”

Everyone’s immediate focus was prayer.

“Two days before this happened,” Dennis says, “the Lord

Chaplain Cecil R. Richardson:

Satisfying spiritual HUNGER

Chaplain (Maj. Gen.) Cecil R. Richardson is Chief of Chaplains, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C. As a member of the special staff of the Chief of Staff, he advises on all matters pertaining to the religious and moral welfare of Air Force personnel.

Richardson is responsible for establishing an effective total chaplain program to meet the religious needs of all members of the Air Force. As Chief of Chaplains, he is the senior pastor for more than 800,000 active-duty, Guard, Reserve, and civilian forces serving in the United States and overseas. He leads an Air Force Chaplain Service of approximately 2,200 chaplains and chaplain assistants from the active and Air Reserve components. As a member of the Armed Forces Chaplains Board, he and other members advise the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff on religious, ethical and quality-of-life concerns.

While serving as Deputy Chief of Chaplains in 2004, Richardson (who is also an endorsed Assemblies of God chaplain) spoke with *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* about ministry priorities.

"No one ever asks, 'Why do we have chaplains in Iraq and Afghanistan?'" Our uniformed personnel welcome every opportunity to talk with a chaplain. Young people today have lots of questions to ask, and they're just as spiritually hungry as any generation ever. I've been to the Persian Gulf region at least 40 or 50 times, and every time I go I run out of Bibles to hand out. I've never left that area without wishing I could have stayed longer and spent more time with our troops. And I never cease to be amazed at the quality of our young people. Their commitment and dedication to our country will literally bring tears to your eyes.

"When they're out there in the desert they have plenty of time to think about what's important in life. They say, 'My family is important, my wife is important, my husband is important, my children are important.' They also say, 'My relationship with God is important.' If they've not been going to church, they consider whether their life's priorities are right. Throw a fear factor into that picture, add to it the fact that they're seeing people who are hurt and dying, and you can easily understand why our military people experience a sense of urgency to find God. They know firsthand the importance of having a firm spiritual foundation to stand on when the storms of life arise." **tpe**

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

President George W. Bush awards Lukas Shook the Purple Heart as parents Dennis and Cynthia Shook look on.

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gave me a Scripture in Psalm 118:8 that says, 'It's better to trust in the Lord than to put your confidence in man.' I'd read that before, but for some reason it stuck out to me. And then two days later I get this phone call, and we have used that Scripture from then on."

"Without God, we couldn't have made it," says Lukas' mother, Cynthia Shook. "If you don't have God, there's no hope. We have made it a family mission to use this experience as a tool to witness."

Psalm 118:8 immediately came to mind when Dennis and Cynthia joined Lukas at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., in December. When a team of doctors offered their outlook for Lukas' future, they all agreed his spinal damage was profound and he would likely never walk again.

But Dennis knew he had received God's assurance.

"Lukas," he promised, "the doctors will look at their X-rays and they'll look at the things that they 'know.' But I'm telling you, we walk by faith, and God's already showed me you're going to walk again."

Two weeks later, Lukas was walking.

THE LONG HAUL

But there were other complications. The brain swelling caused by the explosion had necessitated removal of part of Lukas' skull. The gaping wound through his pelvis was very slow to heal. Even encased in a torso brace, Lukas' attempts at walking created stress on his spinal injuries. Nerve damage plagued his right side.

For Emily, the only solution was to be with the man she loved. Not just during Dennis and Cynthia's extended visits, but 24/7. She quit her job, sold her car, moved out of her rental home and pulled up stakes for Washington, D.C. The staff at



Walter Reed welcomed her and provided a reclining chair where she could sleep by Lukas' bed.

There followed weeks of medical procedures and therapies. Weeks of pain and progress. Weeks of growing more in love as much because of their shared pain as in spite of it.

"I'm so grateful I have been able to go through this with him," Emily says. "We know more about each other than some people who've been married for years."

Emily went with Lukas to Tampa, Fla., for additional rehabilitation. Then, finally, the couple came home to Stafford for the month of April.

COMMUNITY OUTPOURING

On April 4, a crowd of friends and family from across Stafford and nearby Springfield gathered at a reception for Lukas and Emily at the Stafford School District Early Childhood Center, just a stone's throw from where the couple first met.

There were hugs and tears and respectful acknowledgements of Lukas' Purple Heart. There were congratulations when people learned Lukas had officially proposed to Emily during his rehabilitation in Tampa. The couple hugged guests and smiled in return, their wedding plans still a secret.

People came to see the young man who had sparked countless prayer vigils. To share memories with the family they had rallied around through fund-raisers and cards and gifts of every kind.

"I feel like God knew we were ready to come home on convalescent leave," Emily says. "We were both so tired. I felt like God gave us this little time to regroup and go back after it again."

And they are going "back after it again" with all the faith and determination they share. By early May, Lukas and Emily were again at Walter Reed preparing for Lukas' cranial reconstruction and additional rehabilitation. There are sure to be challenges in the months to come, but they believe God has been with them every step of the way.

Dennis and Cynthia share that conviction.

"The night after this happened," Dennis remembers, "I was walking through the kitchen and I asked the Lord, 'Why our son?' And the Lord told me, 'I will be glorified in this.'"

"God has definitely been glorified many times over through this whole situation. Anytime somebody asks

us about Lukas, they'll hear about the Lord. Every time. That's why Lukas has come this far. Look at what God has done. He's preserved his life. He's kept him from brain damage. He's allowed him to walk again. And we're still trusting God for more." **tpe**

For a detailed online journal of Lukas' story, visit www.stafford1st.com and select "Lukas updates."

SCOTT HARRUP is senior associate editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* and blogs at Out There (sharrup.ag-blogger.org).

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center

