

# A grandmother's life-changing choice

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**By Dave Havir**

BIG SANDY, Texas—Recently, I learned about an incident that saddened me and inspired me at the same time. How is that possible, you may ask. Sometimes, the lessons of an event do not need much elaboration, because the story tells it clearly.

Allow me to tell you about Sharrel Blankenbaker of Felt, Okla. (which is a small town in the panhandle of the Sooner State), based on many published reports.

Mrs. Blankenbaker died on Aug. 3, 2010. She was married to her husband, Dale, for 36 years. They had three sons and eight grandchildren.

Sharrel was noted for setting an example of sacrifice for the people she loved. And she certainly loved her grandchildren.

## **Visiting grandchildren**

She was excited as she made plans for the visit of two grandchildren from California. Dylan is a 16-year-old boy, and Cassidy is 12-year-old girl.

The two grandchildren flew in to the airport in Amarillo, Texas. Dylan and Cassidy had arrived at the airport at 3:30 p.m. to begin a two-week visit at their grandparents' house.

Sharrel took another grandchild (a 5-year-old) in the car with her on her two-hour trip south to Amarillo.

The four of them (grandmother and three grandchildren) spent the afternoon shopping, running errands and dining with relatives.

## **On the way home**

As they were preparing to make the trip north, they stopped at a Love's convenience store in Amarillo to get drinks and to use the restrooms.

As they were exiting the store just after 9 p.m., a pickup truck blocked their path and a man got out.

The man grabbed Cassidy's arm, pointed a handgun at her head and told her to get into the truck.

At this time, Dylan picked up his little cousin and ran inside the store to call 911.

### **Dangerous predator**

Before we continue with the story, let's notice some background information.

Just 10 minutes previous to the attempted kidnap of Cassidy, the attacker had attempted to kidnap a 31-year-old woman at another convenience store about a half mile away.

And then, 10 minutes after Cassidy's episode, the attacker came upon two 11-year-old girls walking along a road. The man stopped his truck and forced one of the girls inside at gunpoint. The other girl ran away and got help.

About 15 minutes after this abduction, a Potter County deputy spotted the truck. When the young girl saw the deputy, she opened the passenger door and dived out of the moving vehicle into a ditch.

When the attacker fired shots at the deputies, they returned fire. At 9:27 p.m., the attacker was dead.

### **Previous instruction**

Now back to Cassidy.

As many parents are known to do, Cassidy's mother had diligently given instructions to her children about how to deal with an attempted kidnapping. She had periodically told her children how to handle such a situation.

Cassidy's mother, Barbara, had told the children never to get into a vehicle. Mom had said that if they get into a vehicle they most likely will not survive.

Barbara told them: "Make the biggest scene you can. Fight them, scream, run away if you can. But don't you ever get into that car."

### **Cassidy resisted**

So, when the attacker pointed the handgun at Cassidy's head and told her to get into the truck, she refused and began to struggle.

At that point, Sharrel moved toward the man and told him to let Cassidy go.

The attacker then pointed the gun at Sharrel and reportedly asked her if she wanted to die.

Sharrel apparently answered no. But the attacker shot Sharrel, piercing her lung.

Dylan helped Cassidy find the safety of the store as the attacker fled the scene.

It is reported that a witness to the shooting held Sharrel's hand and prayed for her as she lost consciousness. He said that her last words were about her grandchildren and protecting them from harm.

Sharrel Blankenbaker died because she loved and protected her three grandchildren.