



# Fly Away Home

**Rated:** PG • **Running Time:** 1 hour, 47 minutes

**Starring:** Jeff Daniels as Tom Alden; Anna Paquin as Amy Alden; Dana Delany as Susan Barnes; Terry Kinney as Uncle Dave

**Director:** Carroll Ballard

**Themes:** Father-daughter bonding, teamwork, adopting a noble cause, losing parents to divorce or death, stewardship of wildlife, healing, humility

**Cautions:** Though bloodless and silent, the opening scene features a rollover accident that takes the driver's life. Expect a few mild profanities and exclamatory uses of "my god." There's one s-word late in the film (hit "mute" just as Amy's aircraft buzzes the hunters). Tom bolts out of the house wearing only bikini briefs. A showering girl is seen, obscured, through clouded glass.

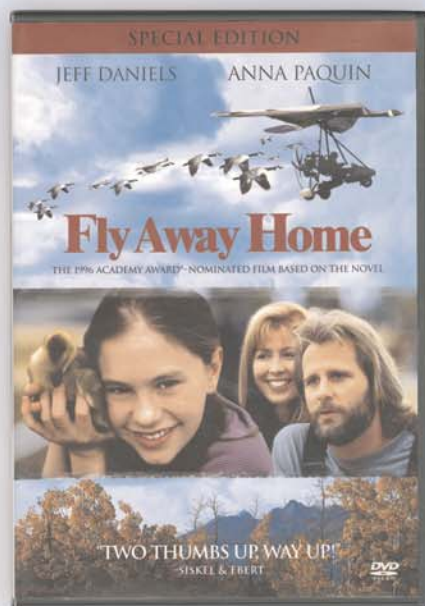
## Story Summary

As we hear the haunting strains of Mary Chapin Carpenter's song "10,000 Miles," a mother and daughter get forced off the road somewhere in New Zealand. Only the 13-year-old girl survives the crash, and she awakens in a hospital bed with her estranged father by her side. Amy hasn't seen him since her parents' divorce nine years earlier. Now he's her guardian.

Tom Alden takes his daughter back to rural Ontario and the home they once shared. The scruffy inventor/artist clearly loves Amy and wants to ease her grief. Still, he's an eccentric up to his ears in work. When he's not welding scales onto an iron dragon, he's strapping on a homemade glider and taking to the skies. Amy thinks he's nuts. Actually, he's nuts about *her* and eager to reconnect. She doesn't make it easy. Sarcastic remarks toward Tom and his girlfriend, Susan, create distance.

One day the tranquility of dawn is rudely interrupted by the belching and grinding of a bulldozer clearing marshland in the name of progress. The intrusion displaces a flock of geese, leaving a nest full of eggs in need of care. Amy secretly gathers them up, builds a makeshift incubator and waits for them to hatch. Once they do, they imprint with her as they would their mother. The fuzzy little goslings follow her everywhere.

But what will happen when they need to migrate? Geese survive by mimicking their own kind. A well-intentioned wildlife officer makes the mistake of trying to enforce an ordinance by clipping their wings. Before he can do it, however, Amy and Tom defend the birds and drive him off. Father and daughter become united by a cause. Tom



promises he won't let anyone hurt the geese. So does Susan, who tells Amy, "I can never replace your mother. ... But if you let me, I can be your friend." Amy opens up. She also warms to her goofy Uncle Dave, Tom's visiting brother. However, the biggest breakthrough is with Dad. By making what's important to his daughter important to him, Tom demonstrates how much he cares. He hatches a plan to use his ultralight plane to guide Amy's birds on a migratory path south.

Aided by visual cues and engine sounds, the birds get comfortable enough to trail a one-man aircraft, though only if Amy is at the controls. So Tom sells his prized possession to buy the safest, easiest-to-fly model available. He trains Amy to fly behind him and lead the geese.

Before long they have a flight plan and a deadline. If they can make it to a wetlands region of North Carolina by the first of November, not only will the geese be safe, but dad and daughter will rescue what's left of a sanctuary about to be bulldozed by developers. The honorable journey turns Amy into a media darling. More importantly, it's a rite of passage that bonds father and daughter.

*Chicago Sun-Times* film critic Roger Ebert wrote, "All of this sounds, I suppose, like a daffy retread of *Free Willy* or one of those other movies in which small children befriend noble animals. But *Fly Away Home* is not quite that simple. ... The film [is] visually uplifting, and the story is quirky enough and the dialogue so fresh and well-acted that this film

continued ➤

rises above its genre." Indeed, gorgeous cinematography and Ballard's smart approach to the material make this a nuanced, inspirational family film. Anna Paquin (between winning an Oscar and playing Rogue in the *X-Men* movies) is likable and authentic here as the aimless, hurting girl who finds her way not by brooding but by looking beyond herself and serving others.

### Before You Watch

Track down a copy of the Christian book *Why Geese Fly Farther Than Eagles* by Bob Stromberg. Turn to the poem on pages 13-18 for a great lesson about teamwork that will also deepen your family's appreciation of how God designed geese for migration.

**Bible Bookmarks** Josh. 1:8; Psalm 119:9-11 and v.105; Prov. 3:5-6, 12:26; Luke 22:27; John 13:14; Rom. 13:1; 1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:4-8; 2 Tim. 3:16-17

### Talking Points

**1** What did you think when you saw Amy flying? Were you more nervous for her safety or envious of her opportunity? Was it responsible of Tom to put his daughter in a plane like that? Why or why not?

**2** How was Amy, like the geese, in need of someone to show her the way in life? Why is it important to be careful whom we follow? Read Proverbs 12:26. Then discuss the need to use God's Word as our primary guide (Josh. 1:8, Prov. 3:5-6, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Psalm 119:9-11 and v.105).

**3** What impressed you most about how everyone banded together to save the geese? Have you ever found yourself caring for a homeless or injured animal? What happened, and how did it make you feel?

**4** Amy is visibly displeased that Susan has been known to spend the night with her father. Talk about the moral issue of cohabiting outside of marriage, and why God disapproves of it. For a practical, biblical view of the issue, scan helpful articles at [troubledwith.com](http://troubledwith.com) (search "cohabitation").

**5** The scale model of the Lunar Lander had been the final straw that sent Tom's family packing. Selling it became a catalyst for restoration with Amy. Why? What did that creation symbolize, and why was Tom's decision to part with it so significant?

**6** The ranger comes across as the bad guy, but he isn't a typical screen villain. How is he different? Put yourself in his place. Did he have other options? Do you think the Aldens overreacted? Apply Romans 13:1.

**7** What do the filmmakers think of nature? Of land developers? Explain whether you feel it was fair to portray developers so negatively. Can you think of a reasonable compromise between using the land and preserving it?

**8** Amy gets a nose ring, which doesn't seem to bother her dad. How does your family feel about body piercing? What's acceptable? How much is too much?

**9** Amy expresses Mom's opinion that artists can be selfish, which apparently hurt the marriage between her (a singer) and Tom (an inventor/sculptor). Why might creative people have difficulty at times with selfishness? Have you struggled with it? How?

**10** Read Luke 22:27, John 13:14 and 1 Corinthians 10:24. How did father and daughter each find healing by turning their attention to the needs of others? Are you struggling with personal pain? Maybe relief is as close as your decision to focus less on that issue (which may be beyond your control) and more on helping those around you. Pray about ways you can do that.

**11** Whether or not you agree with the filmmakers' bias, there's no denying that they use images and characterizations to guide the audience's rooting interest. (Example: creating warmth and sympathy for a struggling family while portraying the developers as an ominous, generally faceless "force.") They pit cold, marauding construction equipment against a cute, motherless girl and orphaned birds. Not hard to pick sides, right? Role-play for a moment. Hollywood is offering you millions of dollars for a script that makes prospective homeowners/developers sympathetic while it vilifies stubborn environmentalists. Together, brainstorm ideas that would tell *that* story. You'll observe how an agenda can shape a script.

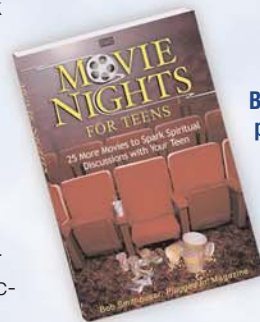
### Follow-Up Activity

- Most parents can identify with Tom's exasperation in attempting to reach Amy ("I've tried everything. I've been nice to her. I've been tough on her. Nothing's worked"). Success comes when he sets aside his own pursuits long enough to make her priorities his own. What's important to your teen? Look for ways to get out of your comfort zone and connect at a level that will be meaningful to him or her. It's humbling, effective and Christlike (Phil. 2:4-8).
- If you're intrigued by the "imprinting" process, rent the beautiful wildlife feature *Winged Migration*—and don't miss the making-of bonus material. Fascinating!

### Just for Fun

From 1989-92, Dana Delany earned four Best Actress Emmy nominations for her role as Army nurse Colleen McMurphy on the ABC drama *China Beach* (she won twice). Not too shabby. But it was her grandfather, John, who *really* changed the world by inventing the Delany Valve, a flushing mechanism still used in modern toilets (see it at [coynedelany.com/design.php](http://coynedelany.com/design.php)). Coincidentally, Dana's character in *Fly Away Home* is dating an inventor. —by Bob Smithouser

A **plugged in** Resource  
online



**BY THE BOOK:** "There's something inherently powerful about stories. That's why Jesus used parables to teach important lessons to His disciples."

—*Movie Nights for Teens*

You can request this resource by contacting Focus on the Family at 800-232-6459 (in Canada, 800-661-9800).