

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

UMMC DENTIST'S REACTION TO STAGED BURGLARY TO BE BROADCAST NATIONALLY

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JACKSON, Miss. – While enjoying a leisurely meal, you notice someone walk up to a parked car, appear to force a door open and begin to rifle through the vehicle's contents.

Every instinct you have indicates that the person is committing a burglary, but no one else seems to notice and there's no security in sight.

What would you do?

Dr. Steve Magee's response to that very scenario will most likely be broadcast to a national television audience Friday, May 30, on the ABC newsmagazine "Primetime: What Would You Do?" hosted by John Quinones.

In the hidden camera-format show, actors portray scenes of conflict or illegal activity in public while bystanders' reactions are recorded. Once the ruse is revealed, Quinones interviews the bystanders about the incident.

Quinones and his crew visited Jackson April 3 and furtively set up the "car burglary" scenario at a local restaurant. So when Magee, assistant professor of dentistry, and three of his colleagues from the Department of Care Planning and Restorative Sciences happened to have lunch there that day, they fell right into the television producer's "trap."

"It was my first time to go (to that restaurant), and the parking lot was packed," Magee said. "We were just having lunch, talking about the things we're always talking about. I didn't pay any attention to the car at first."

Magee's party had been seated at a table on an outdoor terrace that was separated from the street by a exterior wall. A woman in a brand-new black automobile had driven up, parked mere feet away from where Magee was sitting and gone into the restaurant.

A few minutes later, Dr. John Smith, associate professor of dentistry, noticed something out of the ordinary: a man in a jacket walked up to the car and started to peer into its window. Smith began snapping his fingers to summon assistance.

"I was trying to get somebody's attention, but nobody would respond," Smith said. "First, I saw the guy look in the car, then he started digging around, and then I saw him pick up a purse. He went around the car and I think he pulled out a guitar case.

"Finally, Steve did something."

What Magee did was confront the would-be burglar.

"When John looked up and said, 'that guy's getting something out of that car,' I turned around to look. That's when I heard the trunk lever click open," Magee said. "The guy continued to walk around to the trunk. He was looking in and behaving like he was getting something out of the trunk."

When Magee said something, the intruder pulled his hoodie up over his head and continued his work unabated.

"That was an obvious sign that he was trying to hide his face from us," Magee said. "I had tried to get his attention, but he was ignoring us. At this point, I thought he was starting something."

So Magee picked up his stool and started after the intruder.

"It all happened in a matter of seconds, but one thought I had, 'if I swing this chair and miss this guy, I might mess the car up and that would probably cost more than what the stuff he got out of it cost,'" Magee said. "But right away, he started yelling 'It's my car' and tried to diffuse the situation."

It wasn't until Quinones and the cameramen appeared that Magee realized the scenario wasn't real.

"I've seen the show before, and I recognized him (Quinones), but I wasn't expecting them to be here in the South," Magee said. "I was really glad I didn't take a swing at the guy."

After being interviewed by Quinones, Magee and his party were seated elsewhere for their "real" meal, and the scene was reset for another unsuspecting table of diners. Magee observed them as they watched the intruder rifle through the car, pull out all manner of contents and slink away with the goods.

"They giggled about the guy until the lady came back later, and they told her someone had stolen stuff out of her car," Magee said. "I couldn't believe that. It's amazing how many times people (in that situation) do almost nothing."

Which may be the point of the show – and Magee may be an exception, someone who will come to a stranger's assistance, even if he or she isn't around.

Magee said he's looking forward to seeing himself on national TV, and he's got a good reason to be confident that his reaction to the scenario will be broadcast.

"Later that day, I went back to the restaurant and saw the same waitress that had served us," Magee said. "She told me that the producer had said they'd never had anyone pick up a chair before, so that's probably going to be on the air."

"It was kind of a hoot, and a good practical joke. It sure felt real at the time. I'm not sure how the program will turn out, but I hope viewers will look at it from the perspective that at least there's still someone around who will help protect people's stuff."

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