



## Mugging at Midnight | BY FERN BABCOCK



**O**n a frosty Michigan night in November 2012, George and I were in Benton Harbor for the showing of the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*, a documentary highlighting the dilemma of gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists who love their church. Our daughter Sherri, whose family is featured in the film, drove up from Ohio for the screening and panel discussion afterward, and shared our hotel room. At the theater, we found dozens of inter-

ested persons, as well as students and faculty from Andrews University, eagerly awaiting the film. So many wanted to see the film that the producers had to schedule a second showing, and due to the after-film discussions, the event ended after midnight. We headed out the door, leaving a faculty member, a couple of students, and the husband-and-wife team who had spent over three years producing the compelling film—Stephen Eyer and Daneen Akers.

George had parked our Highlander

in a handicapped parking spot directly in front of the theater, and he, Sherri, and I hurried to get out of the cold. Just as we started up the car, a young man waving his hand ran toward us from the theater entrance. We stopped, thinking it was one of the Andrews University students, and George rolled down his window.

“I was here at the movie and my friends drove off and left me,” he said. “Could you give me a ride just to that McDonald’s over there? I’m staying at the Motel 6 and can get there from McDonald’s.” Pulling his scarf closer about his neck and shivering obviously, he pointed to the golden arches half a mile down the road. When we hesitated, he added, “Don’t worry. I’m a good guy. I just need a ride.”

I gave George a questioning look and he shrugged. Then I turned to Sherri in the seat behind me and said, “Do you mind having this guy sitting by you?”

She shook her head. “No, he looks cold, and it’s just a little ways.” So, George told him to get in.

We left the lot, and had gone only a block when our hitchhiker exclaimed, “Oh no! My bad! Take a left here. Then a right at the stop sign. I can walk to the motel from there—in front of Meijer.”

Confused, George asked, “Where? Where?”

"There's a road in front of Meijer," he replied, pointing. "Right over there."

Obediently, George drove to the road bordering Meijer's deserted parking lot. We were all puzzled and alarmed by then. Suddenly, our man demanded, "Stop the car. Right here."

George stopped. Without further ado, our passenger pulled out a pistol, waved it around, and announced, "This is a holdup. I want your money."

I turned in my seat so I could see him right behind George. "What?" I asked, "What do you want?"

"This is a holdup," he said again.

Sherri put out her hand and patted his right arm, since the gun in his left hand was now drilling into George's left shoulder, which rose above the car seat.

"Oh, no, no, no," she protested.

"You're not going to do this."

"This is a real holdup," he insisted, "and this is a real gun. I need your money. You can get more, but I can't."

Sherri kept patting his arm and talking. "I understand that you have a real gun, and we will give you some money. But what's really going on in your life that you have to go to this extent to get some money?"

This holdup wasn't going at all as the young man had planned. We didn't seem scared, we seemed to want to help him, and this young woman kept patting his arm. Frantic, he began cussing loudly and pointing the gun at each of us in turn.

I asked George for his wallet, extracted the three 20-dollar bills from it, and began talking to the gunman again.

"How much do you need?" I asked.

"Two hundred dollars!" he answered.

"We don't have that much," I told him, "but here's sixty dollars. Now would you please get out of the car,

and I'll hand it to you?"

He shook his head. "I need at least twenty dollars more."

"I don't have that," I said. "But here's sixty dollars. Take it and go."

"Don't be messing with me!" he snapped. "I have your license number and I have friends in high places and I can find out where you live and come after you. Is your money worth more than your life?"

Sherri was still talking a blue streak. "You don't want to do this. This isn't the way to solve your problems. . . You aren't going to hurt us because this car is full of angels and God's presence."

He countered with, "*Get your hands off me!*"

I looked him square in the face and said, "May I pray for you?"

He paled and stammered, "What? What?"

I persisted. "May I pray for you? I'm going to pray for you. Bow your head."

I bowed mine and began to pray, asking God to help this young man, whatever his situation was. I have no idea what I said, but it seemed like a lengthy prayer.

As soon as I began to pray, the mugger took the gun from George's shoulder—we don't know if it went back in his pocket or where—threw both arms around Sherri, and began sobbing on her shoulder.

"This is unbelievable. I'm supposed to be in charge here! I can't believe this. What's happening?" Sob, sob, sob.

Sherri was patting his leg and whispering, "It's OK. It's OK. You're going to be all right."

When I said "Amen," he sat up, wiped his eyes, and spoke.

"This is only the second time I've done this, and I'll never do it again," he said. "I'm having a hard time. My moth-

er and my grandmother died in the last three months, and I've got three kids to care for. You look a lot like my grandmother," he said, nodding at me. (I hoped he liked his grandmother!)

I faced the mugger and repeated my request.

"OK. As soon as you get out of the car, I'll give you the money."

"No you won't," he said. "You'll drive off fast and leave me. You'll call the cops and they'll catch me. Give me the money and I'll get out, I promise. I could have taken your purse and wallet, but I can see you're good people. Just give me the money and I'll go and we'll pretend this never happened."

When he said he could take my purse, I got mad. Exactly one week earlier, my purse had been stolen from a cart in the Walmart parking lot, and I'd spent all week trying to cancel cards and get replacements and a new driver's license! The idea of losing *this* purse was too much!

I faced him with determined eyes. "You promise? We can't trust your promise! You have done nothing but lie to us ever since before you got into our car. But I haven't lied to you! *I do not lie!* Get out of the car. Here's twenty dollars. My husband will hand you the other forty dollars when you're outside. See? He's holding it out the window. Just go get it."

He looked confused. When he'd announced the holdup, he'd pulled his scarf up over his face. When he was crying on Sherri's shoulder, it was down. Now, it was up again.

"Okay. I'll get out." He opened the door, the light went on, and he panicked. "Turn off the light! Turn off the light!"

Sherri reached up and turned off

**Mugging** → continued on page 62...

**Mugging** → continued from page 7...

the light.

Again, he opened the door and put one foot on the ground.

“Okay. I’ve got one foot out. Now give me the money.”

I shook my head. “Not till you are all out and shut the door.”

“You’ll floor it and take off! You’ll call the cops!”

I shook my head again and leaned forward. “You forgot. *We don’t lie!* And we won’t call the cops. But there’s one thing you’re going to have to watch out for. We turned you over to God tonight. He’s going to be after you until he catches you. He loves you and wants you in heaven. He’s better than cops.”

Leaning toward him as he half-exited the car, Sherri chimed in.

“Yeah, God’s going to do something in your life. Watch for it *this* week. He’ll intervene in your life somehow. You’re going to be all right.”

He sighed, and leaped out of the car.

George held the money out the window at arm’s length.

He hesitated, shut the door, snatched the money, and then grabbed George’s hand and uncovered his face.

“I’m sorry,” he blurted, “and I’ll try to make restitution somehow. I promise I won’t do this again. You’re good people.”

And with that, he turned and ran back up the access road—we think. None of us looked to see where he’d gone! We just drove off.

We hadn’t gone two blocks before Sherri said, “Oh no! Daneen and Stephen might still be at the theater. He might get back there and hold them up—and they have the offering from both showings in a big popcorn bucket. I have to warn them!” She dialed Daneen’s number. We had all

been so calm during the holdup, but now Sherri’s hand shook so hard that she could barely hold the phone to her ear. To her relief, Daneen reported that they were in the car on their way home. Sherri told her what had just happened.

“No!” Daneen exclaimed. “We came out of the theater right after you. It’s a good thing he wasn’t standing there, then, because someone asked how much we’d gotten in offerings, and a student called out, ‘\$980! Isn’t that great?’ After Stephen and I said good-night, we made our way to the rental car, which we’d parked on the far edge of the lot in the dark. If that guy hadn’t gone with you, we’d have lost all the offering! I’m so thankful you weren’t hurt. This is terrible!”

True to our promise, we didn’t call the police. But the faculty member who had rented the viewing site did inform the theater manager that someone had been mugged, and he should request police protection for his patrons after midnight.

Back at the hotel, we read Psalm 91 and thanked God for guardian angels. In trying to process the whole thing, we puzzled over why all three of us felt we should pick up this fellow—although it was 12:45 a.m. in a notoriously high-crime town.

“I think God struck us stupid,” Sherri concluded. “He wanted to intervene in that young man’s life and protect the movie money. It’s kind of like the sixty dollars he took was insurance on the \$980! If you’d told him no when he asked for a ride, he’d either have pulled the gun on us then, or robbed Stephen and Daneen when they came out a few minutes later. They were young and fit and more of a threat, and if he had overheard the amount of

money they had, the stakes would have been higher, and they could have been hurt badly.

“Two old people and a woman had looked like an easy mark. He just hadn’t counted on a car full of angels! As soon as he told us to turn away from McDonald’s, I made a plan. I thought if he did anything strange, I’d throw out my left arm and karate chop him across the face and follow it with a right punch. But when he said it was a holdup, God just filled me with love for the guy. We’d been talking all evening about God loving everyone, and I guess God gave me a glimpse of what it’s like to look through his eyes.”

Since then, we’ve been praying for the young robber, asking God to turn his life around. We can hardly wait for heaven to hear the rest of the story. ■

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involved in Adventist education since 1961. She holds a master of arts in teaching. She has published twelve books and numerous arti-

cles; taught English and literature in elementary and secondary schools, and college, for thirty-one years; and is currently the volunteer librarian at Hinsdale Adventist Academy in Illinois. She is looking forward to returning to her home in Tennessee in June to continue her writing. Fern loves traveling and grew up in Ghana. She and her husband enjoyed eight years as missionaries in Pakistan. The Babcocks have been married for fifty-five years and are blessed with a son, a daughter, and three adorable granddaughters.