

4-1-2011

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Recommended Citation

Kelley, Jessica Miller (2011) "What would you do? Saffell's scenario hits airwaves," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 54 : Iss. 1 , Article 35.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol54/iss1/35>

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WHAT WOULD YOU DO? SAFFELL'S SCENARIO HITS AIRWAVES

REALITY TELEVISION SHOWS often highlight the worst in human behavior, from screaming housewives to scheming D-list celebrities. But at least one show aims to catch people at their best, doing what's right by standing up for others.

ABC's "What Would You Do?" features actors playing out awkward or immoral situations while cameras record how unknowing bystanders respond. Will they intervene and stand up for what is right? Often they do.

The program, hosted by John Quiñones, recently held a contest inviting viewers to submit their ideas for a scenario to be presented on the show. Out of 12,000 entries, one of the five submissions chosen was that of Amy Saffell '04.

Saffell, who was born with spina bifida and has used a wheelchair her entire life, suggested a scenario in which a young woman in a wheelchair is harassed in a grocery store by a well-meaning but condescending fellow shopper. Such treatment is one of the many frustrations Saffell has encountered, but as a regular viewer of the show she says that the only episode she'd seen dealing with wheelchair issues was one about handicap parking.

"Not a week goes by when I don't experience someone thinking that I'm far less capable than I really am," Saffell wrote in a piece for ABC.com. She thought viewers should see how people in wheelchairs want — and do not want — to be treated, and thought a feature bringing those issues to light would be a great fit for "What Would You Do?"

ABC agreed. After receiving Saffell's submission in November, they called her in early February and invited her to New York for the taping of her segment, which aired February 22. Saffell and her mother enjoyed five days in the Big Apple, taking in Times Square, 5th Avenue, Tiffany's, "LIVE! With Regis and Kelly," and *Driving Miss Daisy* with Vanessa Redgrave and Morgan Freeman.

Saffell, a communication studies major at Furman, also spent time before and during the trip advising the producers of "What Would You Do?" on how her story should work. "They wanted a lot of specific input," she says. "They were careful to handle the situation with as much respect as possible. It was gratifying to know the issue was being taken seriously."



Amy Saffell (left) and actress Shannon DeVido share ideas in preparation for the shoot.

Saffell watched the filming of her story from a back room as an actress in a wheelchair was greeted cheerfully by another actress playing a naïve and over-zealous "Samaritan."

"What is your name?" the woman asked brightly. "How old are you?" Speaking as one would to a small child, the woman patted the wheelchair-bound actress' head, gushed over her, and insisted on pushing her wheelchair and carrying her groceries for her.

"This is stuff you've really heard?" an incredulous Quiñones asked Saffell.

Yes, it is. One incident Saffell recalls was a woman in an airport who insisted on pushing her to the restroom, yelling all the way for people to move, and then asking Saffell's mother once they were near the stall, "Aren't you going to help her?"

Saffell, who'll be 29 in June, says that people

often assume she is younger or less capable than she really is. But she says she faced few problems during her Furman years. As manager for the men's basketball team, she says she felt very much accepted, and recalls a time when the players were moving some equipment and asked her to carry three basketballs. Needing two hands to wheel her chair, it was difficult, but she did it, and was

glad that the players just assumed she could.

Many of the bystanders in the "What Would You Do?" segment made the same assumption, stepping in and telling the condescending woman to leave the actress portraying Saffell alone.

Responses to the show have been gratifying, Saffell says. People with disabilities have contacted her via Facebook, saying, "Thank you. This is my story too." Even the actress playing the harasser said she learned a lot from the episode.

Saffell hopes that the show will help increase the public's understanding of how individuals with disabilities can be capable and independent. She's a perfect example: She lives alone, drives her

own car, and works in sales and marketing for EMI, a Christian record label near Nashville, Tenn.

Saffell, who was Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee 2007, spends much of her free time volunteering with an organization for disabled youth, helping kids gain independence and self-confidence. But she is also changing perceptions "just by getting out there," she says.

"Whether it's advocacy work or going to the grocery or out to dinner, it's just showing people you can do all the day-to-day things everyone else can do," she says.

Visit <http://abcnews.go.com/WhatWouldYouDo> to see Saffell's story.

— JESSICA MILLER KELLEY

The author, a 2003 graduate, is a magazine and book editor in Nashville. Photo by Lou Rocco/ABC News.