

# Managing the Threat: How to Handle a Mugging

*Editor's Note: This is the final article of a three-part series revealing what robbers look for when targeting victims and what you can do to avoid becoming one.*

[Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#)

At the end of the first installment in this series, Minnesota husband and father Lee Michaels was on his knees, staring down the barrel of a 9mm handgun one night in November 2005. He had been mugged outside of his townhome in Brooklyn Park, and his two assailants were satisfied with neither the keys to his Cadillac nor the amount of cash in his wallet. The man with the pistol demanded that he and his partner be driven to the ATM of a nearby bank in order to withdraw more. For Michaels, that was the precise moment when everything changed.

“I literally had this sensation that just went from my head to my toes,” he recalled.

The second Michaels realized that he wasn't going to be shot dead on the sidewalk — that his assailants wanted something more from him and that they were going to take him to a secondary location — he pushed fear aside and began working to regain control of the situation. He blocked out what the men were saying and began taking note of their clothing and other identifying marks. He began to work out a plan of action in his mind. It helped that he had previously spent time visualizing how he would handle an incident in his garage.

Michaels opened the door of his car and got behind the wheel while the unarmed assailant struggled to climb over a child's car seat to take a place in the back. During this time, Michaels fingered a cellphone in his jacket pocket and considered attempting to dial 911 without looking. He was thwarted, however, by a paper receipt from a gas purchase he had made on his way home.

“When I stuck my hand in my pocket,” he said, “to me it sounded like I was crinkling up cellophane or something.

It was so loud. It probably wasn't, but that's just the adrenaline and everything.”

Michaels pulled his hand out of his pocket and put it back on the steering wheel when the armed assailant struck him on the head three times with his pistol. The man then walked around the rear of the car — sweeping his partner and Michaels in the process

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— making his way to the front passenger side door. When Michaels realized the car was too close to the garage wall for someone to get in on that side, he recognized this as his chance.

“As soon as he opened the door and it hit the wall, I started the car,” Michaels said. “He kind of turned sideways with the gun in his right hand. He turned his back to me, thinking he could slide in. And the second he turned, I just put the car in gear and took off. I thought, *I’m going to lose my door and tear my garage apart.* And I’m like, *I don’t give a rip.*”

Michaels ducked down for safety as his 300-horsepower luxury car rocketed out of the garage. He thought that if the armed assailant survived and started shooting, at least he’d be protected by the engine block. As he spun the car around and positioned it to head for the parking lot exit, Michaels noticed that his car door was closed. He looked into his rearview mirror and saw the armed man lying face down on the garage floor, attempting to get up on his hands and knees.

“I figured what happened was when I took off, the door dragged him until he hit the edge of the garage,” Michaels recalled. “And it spun him, closed my door and obviously messed him up to a degree.”

Because the Cadillac’s doors automatically locked when the car was put into gear, the assailant in the backseat found himself trapped. As Michaels sped through the parking lot, the man was on his back, trying to kick out a window with his feet. He then shouted, “I’m going to f\*\*\* you up” and repeatedly tried to strike Michaels. Fortunately,

the blows were largely deflected by the driver’s seat headrest.

Upon exiting the parking lot, Michaels scuffled further with his assailant and eventually stopped and abandoned his car with the man still inside. While running away in an attempt to create distance, he called 911 and quickly encountered a Brooklyn Park police officer.

As discussed in the second installment of this series, the unarmed assailant was eventually caught. The man with the pistol never was. Michaels went on living a productive life and currently resides about 15 miles away from the scene of the crime.

## **The ‘Filing Cabinet’**

Examining this mugging from the comfort and safety of my home office, I’m struck by the number of things that Michaels did right in order to extricate himself from an

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extremely dangerous situation, starting with visualizing what he might do during a garage incident before it ever happened. Visualization was one of the cornerstones of his self-defense strategy long before he became licensed to carry concealed. And it paid dividends.

“What you see with the visualization is, it gives you a blueprint, a plan of action to go to in a time of crisis,” said self-defense expert and retired law enforcement officer Steve Kardian. “It may not be perfect, but it’s something. And what’s important about that is it’s going to help you control your adrenaline response.”

Regarding the adrenaline response, it’s common knowledge that as heart rate increases during a time of crisis, skills begin to deteriorate, culminating in almost total paralysis. Kardian, for example, could barely speak the first time he responded to a serious call as a law enforcement officer. Toward the end of his career, however, he’d calmly finish his coffee — heart rate stable — while envisioning what he was likely to encounter on the scene.

Kardian has written extensively about the benefits of visualization in his 2017 book *The New Superpower for Women: Trust Your Intuition, Predict Dangerous Situations, and Defend Yourself From the Unthinkable*. He notes:

Imagine your brain as a filing cabinet, organizing and storing facts, knowledge and information. Everything you have read, learned or thought about has a place. Some folders are thick, used frequently, while others are filed away to be referred to later. For most people, the file labeled SELF-DEFENSE is thin. You may hear about an incident and spend a second or two wondering what you would do in that situation, but then you let it go. It is scary to think about, and finding the correct answer seems daunting. But when you are unexpectedly involved in something like road rage, stalking, home invasion or assault, you want to be able to flip instantly in your brain to a well-informed self-defense file. If it’s empty when you need it most, you are left as a soft target.<sup>1</sup>

The good news, Kardian said, is that through visualization, you can develop an unlimited number of blueprints, or plans, that can guide you on how to react in almost any situation. He recommends incorporating visualization exercises into your daily routine. You can start by thinking about a place that you frequent and how you would respond to a crime or a crisis situation at that particular location. With regard to a mugging, he suggests the following:

“First off, you want to think there’s going to be no hesitation,” Kardian stated. “You’re going to give up your property. You know, you never bargain with your life for your property. Make it a business transaction.”

## Comply or Fight Back?

Kardian brings up an interesting question, the answer to which is not universally agreed upon by experts. When you're confronted by a mugger, should you comply or fight back? For firearms training expert Massad Ayoob, there is no question.

"If he's already got you, I think you're a God damn fool to draw against a drawn gun," he said. "It's only money."

As a general rule, Ayoob is a proponent of compliance. That's what he recommends to veteran police units during training sessions. Normally muggers are very pragmatic, he said. They just want the money. They don't want the heavy heat of having killed somebody, possibly with witnesses around. The equation changes, however, when you realize your assailant is going to escalate the situation.

"If you think you're about to be murdered, fight," Ayoob declared. "If you're already under attack and being assaulted? And there's no reason to believe the assault is going to stop? Fight."

Former police officer and current instructor Tom Givens has a different take. He's an advocate of immediately and forcefully fighting back as opposed to giving in to a mugger's demands. According to his interpretation of crime statistics, this approach makes the most sense.

"Compliance works except for the times that it doesn't," Givens stated. "The problem with waiting to see if they're going to kill you is how the hell do you stop them from killing you? The problem is you won't have a vote in these things. And compliance removes your options altogether."

Givens said that the last thing a mugger expects is a sudden, violent counterattack. Given that muggers typically pick the path of least resistance (which is supported by the results of our mugger survey), they would not have picked you had they known you were going to fight back. He cited Col. John Boyd's OODA loop, which stands for "observe," "orient," "decide" and "act."

"When the dude pulls his gun or knife and announces a stick up, he's at 'act.' When you suddenly produce a gun that he didn't know you had, you bump him all the way back down to 'observe,'" Givens explained. "He's got to observe that, orient to that, decide what to do about that and then start moving. It's too late by then; you've already fixed the problem."

As with any other type of firearms training, Givens recommends copious amounts of practice, both dry fire and live fire, concentrating on skills such as safely and efficiently presenting your firearm; getting into the proper stance; and getting solid, first-round hits in the 3 to 7-yard envelope — the idea being that the more skill you pick up, the less you'll lose during a time of crisis.

“You can't fool your subconscious,” he said. “It knows if you've done the work. It knows if you haven't done the work. We're not talking about false bravado. We're talking about simply having the skill for your brain to say, ‘OK, we can handle this.’”

Givens summed up his philosophy on mugging and crime in general when he said you can be selected without your consent, but you cannot be victimized without your consent.

## **With a Purpose**

Should you choose to fight back, one concerning reality that surfaced time and again in the mugger survey results was the number of inmates who reported having successfully disarmed a victim during their criminal careers. Givens shared his thoughts on the matter: “You've got to remember most of these guys, in the environments they grew up in, they all know somebody who's been shot and recovered from it,” he said. “Many of them have been shot and recovered from it. They're not really scared of handguns.”

Fortunately, there's an informative video on how to avoid being disarmed, presented by Lt. Dan Marcou, available on the USCCA's YouTube channel. Marcou was a full-time police officer for 33 years and also has extensive experience as a trainer.<sup>2</sup>

“Weapon retention is huge,” he explained. “And so we teach weapon retention, and the chances are if someone disarms you, they're going to shoot you. So disarming is something you've got to try and avoid.”

Marcou recommends carrying concealed as opposed to carrying openly, using a holster with some sort of built-in retention and always being aware of the location or positioning of your firearm in relation to other people. He also suggests trying to put distance between yourself and your would-be mugger once you've made your presentation.

“You want to slow their ability to get to you,” he said. “If you're not a police officer, there's really not very many situations where you want to advance on the person.

Of course, as the old saying goes,

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you win 100 percent of the fights you avoid. And our survey respondents offered a wealth of information on how to avoid looking like an appealing mugging victim. They mainly said to not do the following:

- Flash cash, jewelry or other signs of wealth.
- Walk down dark streets alone.
- Be distracted by a cellphone.
- Look nervous, timid or weak.
- Go into high-crime areas.

Many recommended carrying concealed, carrying pepper spray or having a well-trained dog. Interestingly, survey respondents were split with regard to complying with a mugger's demands versus fighting back. Some said fighting back is a wise strategy.

Others said it's a surefire way to get yourself killed. The choice is yours. Whatever you choose to do, have a plan — and carry it out decisively.

## Hash Them Out Ahead of Time

In the years since he was mugged, Lee Michaels has obtained his permit to carry, taken self-defense classes, installed cameras on his property and given talks about his experience to different groups. He has also discussed self-defense with his wife and daughter. That said, despite his increased awareness, he's not afraid of ninjas dropping out of the ceiling. Paranoia isn't his thing.

"I'm definitely aware," he said. "Even more so than I was before. And I'm really grateful that I thought about some of those things ahead of time. I don't know how it would have turned out had I never thought about that stuff."

Endnotes

(1) *Steve Kardian*, *The New Superpower for Women: Trust Your Intuition, Predict Dangerous Situations, and Defend Yourself From the Unthinkable* (New York: Touchstone, 2017), 112.

(2) USCCA, "Attacker Tries to Grab Your Gun (What to Do Next)," YouTube Video, 6:43, Sept. 17, 2021, <https://YouTube/9ujecTRGLvc>.

## Inmate Suggestions

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Many inmates provided advice on how to avoid becoming a mugging victim on the surveys they returned to *Concealed Carry Magazine*. Here are a few statements that stood out:

- “Walk with Be aware 360 degrees around you. Don’t be a victim.”
- **Brandon Lamb**, *Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution*
  - “Be alert to the world, not a phone screen.” — **Brandon Ray Payne**, *Oregon State Correctional Institution*
  - “Pay attention to your Most muggers will change their minds if they think you are on to them.” — **Anthony Caple**, *State Correctional Institution (Phoenix)*
  - “Get a gun or More so a gun. And stand up for theirsself [sic] because most robbers don’t plan on killing nobody. They just want to get the money without a fight.” — **Tyron Nixon**, *State Correctional Institution (Benner Township)*
  - “Have Get trained and carry at all times. Only carry 9mm or larger.” — **Nicholas Giorno**, *State Correctional Institution (Albion)*
  - “Don’t be flashy. That’s an invite.” — **Christopher M. Williams**, *State Correctional Institution (Benner Township)*
  - “To not get mugged by me, don’t show off or brag about being wealthy/rich.”
- **Jeffrey Lapergolo**, *State Correctional Institution (Houtzdale)*
  - “Stay with a group. Avoid dark places, alleyways, etc. Stay vigilant around suspicious Take self-defense classes.” — **James Logan**, *State Correctional Institution (Mahanoy)*
  - “If you feel like you’re going to be robbed, before the robbery ask the robber for Why would he rob you if you’re broke? And if you are robbed, always tell the robber, ‘I respect the game.’ This would save your life. I’ve done it.” — **Lavond Hill**, *State Correctional Institution (Houtzdale)*
  - “Be licensed to carry and don’t walk around in fear. Because most robbers love to play on ” — **Calvin Adams**, *State Correctional Institution (Phoenix)*

## About The Author: Dorsey Kindler

Dorsey Kindler writes enterprise series for *Concealed Carry Magazine*. He's covered tough topics for gun owners, including the legal use of marijuana and self-defense for truck drivers.

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