

## TV show spurs ethics thoughts

This summer, I watched a few episodes of a television program called "What Would You Do?"

On this program, a news crew set up four situations in public, each likely to attract attention from passers-by. In each situation, someone is being done wrong in one way or another. The goal is to see how people in the public react and to see who stops to help and to see which side they help.

I saw several such situations on the program.

A Muslim American woman was confronted by the bakery worker, while some just expressed sympathy to the woman. A couple of people even sided with the bakery worker.

While some joined in on the hazing and some ignored the situation, many intervened and put a stop to the hazing.

Some walked past the child being picked on, but some confronted the bullies and comforted the child who was being picked on.

Many intervened the man who had passed out in the street, but a few tried to help him or offered to call an ambulance.

Ultimately, the goal intends to make the audience think about doing the right thing and getting involved in situations that help others.

This is a wonderful goal, especially for a television program, a vehicle that often is accused of being devoid of such philosophical issues.

When I first saw the program, I wondered how anyone could stand by while another human being was in potential harm, like children being bullied or college students being forced to drink what a bystander might believe is vodka or rum.

Then I really visualized myself in some of those situations.

Would I stop and help a needy man who has passed out in the street?

Would I stand up for a woman who is being verbally abused and discriminated against?

Would I really say something to a stranger if I thought an injustice was being done?

I like to think I would do the right thing, but I know there are certain situations in which I would not help. Why? Because people are crazy. I'm not sure that, if I just stood up to a stranger on another stranger's behalf, that I wouldn't get physically attacked, even shot or stabbed.

If fear for one's safety a good excuse to turn your head when someone needs help.

No.

Would he worry about getting a black eye if he helped someone? No.

None of us is Jesus. We aren't going to always do the right thing in uncomfortable situations or in dangerous situations.

er group, forcing them to guzzle alcohol (which was, in reality, water).

A group of children was picking on one child.

A man who appeared to be homeless passed out on the street.

Every situation drew someone to help them.

Some stood up for the Muslim American woman by confronting the bakery worker, while some just expressed sympathy to the woman. A couple of people even sided with the bakery worker.

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# Following my own drummer

## Appalachian native becomes professor, studies quantum computing in hopes of speeding up systems

By LEE WARD  
The Independent

Imagine the fastest computer you've ever used. Now, imagine that computer running 10 times faster.

Rod Van Meter doesn't just imagine it; he's working toward it.

The associate professor of environment and information studies at Kelo University, Japan's oldest private university, has been interested in quantum computing since he was an undergraduate.

Van Meter explains his doctoral thesis, how to build a quantum computer, this way: "Instead of using electrical current, which is lots of electrons, or regular light, which is lots of photons, we're trying to figure out how to use electrons or photons one at a time. For some problems that computers solve, we think this will let us compute much faster."

"The differences between, say, being asked to write down the number '1 million,' and being asked to count to a million. If I then turn around and ask you to write down '10 million,' your job only got a little bit harder, but if I ask you to count to 10 million, it just got 10 times harder."

### New class

He also is involved with Global Information and Communications Technology and Governance Academic program, or GIGA, at his university.

"The first class of freshmen will start in fall 2011, and do coursework in both computer science and international relations," he said. "It's targeted at those interested in how technologies like the Internet can be used to improve society, especially in Asia. The classes will be taught in English."

His work and life in Japan are a far cry from his childhood, growing up along the Mingo County, W.Va.-Pike County border.

His family, descendants of the founders of Fort Van Meter near Elizabethtown, settled in the Williamson area in 1820. Since then, his family has flourished in both West Virginia and Kentucky.

Van Meter said he enjoyed a pretty typical childhood. "In the beginning, pretty normal, except for my asthma and my love of books. Playing baseball in the street, hide and seek across the entire neighborhood until well after dark, begging for 15 cents (I think it was) to go to



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the Dairy Queen and the Buster Bar."

### Advanced work

Eventually, Van Meter's aptitude for math and science brought him attention. "I'm not sure when anybody recognized me as 'smart,' I don't think (either) was in the general vocabulary in the 1970s. In 1978, when I was in seventh grade, the counselor received a letter from the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. If she had thrown that letter away, probably I would not be where I am."

"I think three of us from WJHS took the SAT; I was the only one who qualified for SMPY."

While there was no gifted program in place in his

school, Van Meter's parents got permission for him to skip some classes and take some that were ahead of his grade.

"I managed to get credit for the algebra and geometry I did in the SMPY programs over a couple of summers; without that credit, it would have been hard to graduate two years early," he said.

### Early science interest

Van Meter said he always wanted to work in science and got his first computer when he was 14.

He graduated from Williamson High School when he was 16 and continued his education at Caltech, earning a bachelor of science degree in engineering and applied science at 20 and a master's degree in computer engineering from the University of Southern California at 22.

He recently earned his Ph.D. from the university where he teaches at 40.

While teaching is emphasized at Kelo University, he also has the opportunity to pursue research projects.

"My current work on quantum computers, was seeded when I was a Caltech student and took a class on computers from Richard Feynman, the famous Nobel Prize winner," he said. "The year I took the class was the year of the Challenger disaster, so he actually wasn't



tum computing."

Along the way, Van Meter has had a variety of jobs. His first was maintaining a group of large computers used by 50 researchers. He realized then he loved working with the machines.

### Love for machines

"Most of (my jobs) have involved the Internet in one way or another," he said. "From the first time I really used the Internet (before it was even called the Internet), I was hooked, and tried to get my friends connected. But either I never quite realized that it was a way to become rich, or never quite cared; I've always picked my jobs much more for the choice of technical problem and whether or not I liked the people than whether I thought I would get rich. As a result, I'm not rich. Professors don't make very much money."

But Van Meter doesn't regret following the path he's taken.

"Pretty much everywhere I've lived, worked, or gone to school, I've been something of an outsider. Perhaps a little bit too prone to following my own drummer. I'm not a loner, but I have also never allowed fashion (either the sartorial kind, or in terms of the technical problems I choose to work on, or the culture I currently live in) to dictate to me. I'm sure life would be easier in a lot of ways if I did

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