

# Nights on the Wilson Bridge



*Google Images 2021*

The bridge looked much different in the 80's

In June 1981, I accepted a job offer at the Puzzle Palace. We were living in western Fairfax County, VA at the time, in a development called "King's Park West." The commute from home to Fort Meade, Maryland was not a pleasant one, the only reasonable route being around the Washington Beltway (I-495) and up the Baltimore Washington Parkway. Coming home, depending on traffic, I often stayed on the B/W Parkway which becomes I-295 and intersects with I-495 just east of the Wilson Bridge spanning the Potomac river between Maryland and Virginia. While looking diligently for a home in Maryland close to Fort Meade, I made this commute daily for over a month. During that time, I was temporarily assigned to a special task which required that I work nights. I was released early one night and was just climbing up on the Wilson bridge, headed into Virginia, when I came upon stopped traffic in all the lanes. After sitting there for what seemed like an eternity, I shut the

engine off and got out of the car. Other drivers had done the same and people were gathering in groups and discussing the dilemma. An hour or more went by.... One car's passenger took a bicycle from his car rack and peddled away, returning after a while with beer and eats. It turned into sort of a "wreck party." While there, the word trickled back to us from up ahead that the driver of a large sedan had been shot and his car was teetering on the edge of the bridge. Later on, I read in the newspaper that a U.S. Marine had gone berserk and was driving around, randomly shooting at vehicles. Apparently, the marine was crossing the eastbound span of the bridge and shot the driver of the sedan who was crossing westward. This was before the era of cellphones so I had no way of contacting my wife at home to let her know that I was stuck on the bridge. Eventually, the deceased was removed from the wreckage, one lane was opened and I made it home.

Only a few nights later, I was again climbing up on the Wilson Bridge enroute home and met with a similar backup. This one also lasted several hours. The cause this time was a driver who crashed into a big rig loaded with chemical fertilizer, resulting in a major inferno on the eastbound side of the bridge. Eastbound traffic had backed up so bad that firefighting equipment could not get to the blaze. Westbound traffic was stopped so firefighters could come up on the span and shoot water over to the eastbound span. It took a long time, of course, for the fire to be extinguished and for the westbound traffic to move.

After moving to Maryland, I bought a motorcycle. Shelia and I would sometimes go for long rides during the weekend. One Sunday we headed to the Shenandoah mountains and were riding around the northwest section of I-495 when we came to a standstill. A gasoline tanker truck had flipped off a bridge, crashed onto the roadway and burned. Thank goodness we were on a motorcycle which allowed us to take the shoulder to the next exit and bail out of the mess.

Incidents like these taught me to avoid I-495 at all costs.

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