

A Bridge to Childhood Memories

The “little boy” buried deep down inside me came surging to the surface this week, thanks to a construction project right here in the Maple City.

I spent the better part of Wednesday running in and out of the newsroom like a lunatic to witness the replacement of the Sixth Street bridge.

It was a fascinating process engineered by Kohrs Construction and overseen by experts who've directed similar operations all over the state.

The main attraction of this entire event was an

impossibly huge crane.

And, I must say: the “Lane’s Crane” operator is one of the coolest cats I’ve ever seen.

Using what looked to the untrained eye like a pair of Atari video game joysticks, he expertly maneuvered the old bridge over trees, around telephone wires and safely onto the ground.

Then, after a well-deserved nap up there in the cockpit, he roused himself and executed another mid-air ballet ... lifting the new bridge high above the Lackawaxen and gently into place.

It’s the kind of thing I could watch for hours and never be bored.

One Last Time

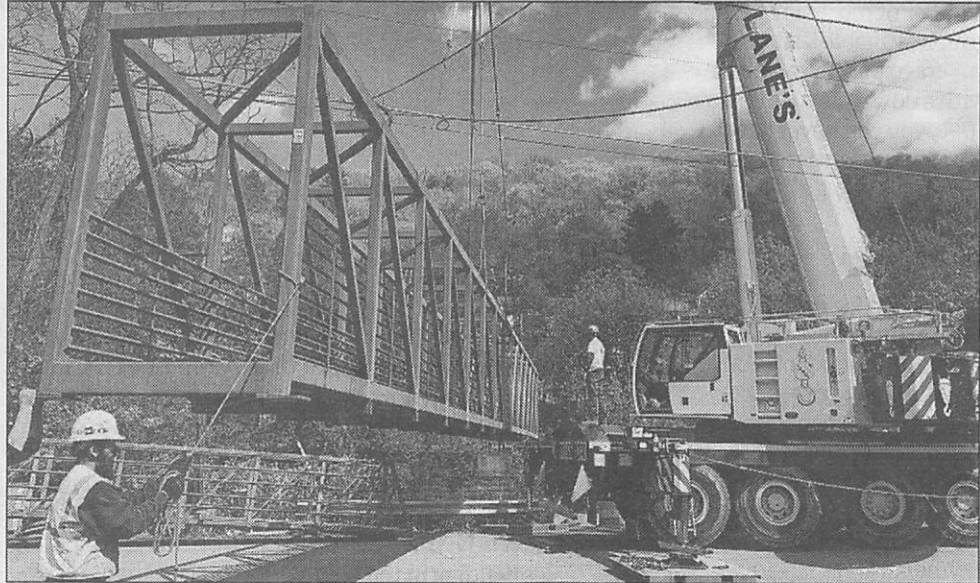
Last Sunday, I stood right smack in the middle of that bridge.

When I was a kid, we all called it the “swinging bridge,” because ... well, back then it did actually swing when you walked across it.

My mission on this particular sun-soaked day was to take pictures of kayakers and as they paddled past



Little boys of all ages (from five to 50!) were drawn to the corner of Court and Sixth Streets this week to watch a massive crane replace the old footbridge with a new, state-of-the-art model. [WAYNE INDEPENDENT PHOTO BY KEVIN EDWARDS]



Dozens of folks commented on social media when asked about their memories of the Sixth Street “swinging bridge.” I received anecdotes about Bishop’s Store on Riverside Drive and about the legendary “Kieglergarten” where several generations of children –me included – attended school. [WAYNE INDEPENDENT PHOTO/KEVIN EDWARDS]

WANDERINGS

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during the 2017 Wayne County Canoe Classic.

I wasn’t alone there on my perch. A handful of adults had the same idea as me, looking for a spot from which to snap photos of this year’s event.

There were also two children, both under the age of five. The little girl was as cute as could be in her little pink hoodie and baseball cap. However, she was also giving her parents heart attacks by trying to wiggle through the bars for a better view of the river below.

This little tiger reminded me of my own kids at that age: wide-eyed, trusting and fearless to a fault.

Little did she know that, less than a week later, the very bridge she was perched upon would be floating high in the sky ... on its way to wherever old bridges go when their time is finally up.

Ah, Memories!

I posted the photos that are included with this week’s column on social media and was pleasantly surprised by the response.

Many folks chimed in with their own memories of the Sixth Street bridge in its many manifestations.

Alice Labar Scott was the first to respond.

Alice wrote that she would attempt to cross the old “swinging bridge” with her daredevil bothers. They’d inevitably sprint across first, giggling and shouting all the way. Unfortunately for Alice, however, their passage would immediately set the bridge swaying, which terrified her.

“So, I never made it across,” she confessed.

Sheryl O’Keefe Smith

wrote that her family lived just a block away from the bridge.

“We spent a lot of time on it and under it,” she said. “Always crossed it on the way to Bishop’s store.”

Erin Walsh also has fond memories of crossing the bridge to Bishop’s.

“When we were little, we used to walk over to this tiny little store and get ice cream pops,” she said. “I’m not sure which I enjoyed more, the bridge or the ice cream.”

Bill White loved riding bikes across with his friends: “Got a flat front tire one time and almost went off the side! It’s scared the hell out of me back then but now makes me laugh.”

Michele Smith DeBlasi recalls walking hand-in-hand with her grandpa.

“When I was little my grandfather would take me over the bridge to the Riverside Drive side,” she wrote. “Someone who lived right by the bridge had ducks and we would walk down the bank to the river to feed them.

“I was scared to death of walking across that thing!”

My friend and classmate, Joan Silberlicht Epstein, used to attend synagogue right next to the bridge.

“We’d visit it during breaks from sabbath school,” Joan said.

“One or two kids would venture to the middle of the bridge and sit down and the others would run back and forth across it getting it to swing as much as possible.

“It was our hometown version of a carnival ride! No tickets needed.”

A Bit of History

According to an article that appeared in The Wayne Independent back in 2006...

“The bridge at 6th Street today doesn’t swing like the old suspensions bridge did, still fondly remembered.

“A petition was field in 1891 to install an iron truss bridge and was known as Farnham’s Bridge. On November 29, 1904, the bridge collapsed when men were working on this bridge; Samuel Stine, 19, of Elk Lake, was killed, and Lloyd Harding of Tunhannock was injured.

“The 1942 flood wiped it out and the wooden swinging bridge was put in, slightly north.”

That’s the bridge that most folks my age recall ... the stuff of Honesdale childhood legend.

Over & Out

The new bridge that awaits its grand re-opening is definitely sturdier and safer than its predecessors.

However, it doesn’t seem to possess the charm of the old “swinging bridge.”

I understand that safety and utility are the main concern of our public officials. And, they’re to be commended for the smooth transition they orchestrated.

I just wonder, though, what intangibles we may have lost with this particular transition.

Somehow, I doubt that future generations will be writing sweetly nostalgic tales of childhood adventures with this new bridge as a backdrop.