

# Remembrances

Dave Bucher looks back at some little gems of experience from his 45 years of riding and writing.

## Shades of Death

There are a lot of regional accents in the continental U.S., but I think our neighboring state of Maryland may have some of the strangest.

Ever been to Smith Island, down in the Chesapeake? If you go, you should take an interpreter. Pretty much the same holds true for the extreme western part of this most-oddy-shaped state.

So it was one year that I found myself wandering those precincts attempting to follow the old National Road from Cumberland to the West. Before it was the National Road, the first improved road built and then maintained by the U.S. government, it had been an Indian trail and then, at the time of the French and Indian Wars, a widened cartway built to allow British troops access to what is now the Pittsburgh area. It was called Braddock's Road at that time and you can still find General Braddock's grave along part of U.S. Route 40 that was constructed over that same path.

But, enough history. During my quest I happened to stray onto an interesting side road and something, it now escapes me what, prompted me to pull into a cluster of buildings.

I was immediately greeted by a father and son tandem and when I blurted out my mission they responded with a patois that was beyond my understanding. All I really got out of it were the words "Shades of Death." Well, could be I'd seen too many chainsaw movies, or perhaps *Deliverance* was fresh in my mind, but I looked at these guys, and then glanced behind them...what's that, a torture chair in their torture shed?...and my blood ran cold.

Maybe I was a little jumpy because just two years before I had gotten some death threats following a piece I'd written on riding in West Virginia. And the difference between western Maryland and West Virginia, well, it's way too fine for me to discern.



Fortunately, reason prevailed before I could turn and run for my life, and as my ear became more accustomed to their strange manner of speech it turned out there was no grisly ax murder fate awaiting me. These were just a couple of good ol' boys making primitive furniture with wood from the abundant forests around them.

The reference to "Shades of Death" was simply their attempt to impart a little history on me. Seems that Braddock's troops, on their road-building march westward, encountered a dense forest of white pine, so dense that all of the lower branches of

the trees had died from lack of light. That area was located nearby and they had simply been trying to enlighten me on this point.

Motorcycling, like flying, can be hours of pleasure interrupted by moments of sheer terror. But aside from this little scare and the genuine pants-wetter I'd felt earlier in the day, when absolute pea soup fog suddenly enveloped me while traveling 60 mph on nearby Savage Mountain, it was an entirely pleasant trip. I'd highly recommend your visiting western Maryland. Just try to stay on the main roads...and out of the shade.