

## Cliché: Don't Burn the Bridge Behind You

*By Sheila Johnson*

Bridges have been and continue to be built in order to connect land, people, and commerce. They are intended to provide shortcuts and safe passage, for pedestrians, tourists, and commercial business. History shows us that the architectural design of some of the world's most famous bridges parallels or even surpasses the safety concerns in constructing these universal connectors. In spite of their beauty, charm, and functionality, bridges do not always land us on dry ground. And some bridges have been burned behind us.

As a young girl, I used to walk across the penny bridge from El Paso to Juarez with my family. We were charged two cents each—one tenth of a dollar for our family of five. We loved to walk on that slatted, swaying wood in anticipation of the fun that would always follow. The penny bridge no longer exists; drug wars and execution style murders have shut it down. In fact, it's no longer safe to drive across the heavily guarded bridge that was once a passage to a beautiful Mexican cultural experience filled with delicious, spicy, native food, open markets, bull fights, donkey rides, and savory cactus candy. That bridge was burned behind drugs.

In my research, I was humbly reminded that I've crossed five of the ten most famous bridges in the world. Their images glare in my mind and in photos. The Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, the Sydney Harbour Bridge in Australia, the Ponte Vecchio Bridge in Florence, Italy, and the Rialto Bridge in Venice, Italy have all given me a true sense of awe and appreciation of the harmonious convergence of nature and man-made materials. These bridges have not been burned.

March 7, 1965 John Lewis (now Congressman Lewis) and Hosea Williams set out to lead six hundred people in a non-violent march from Selma to Montgomery to protest the murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson three weeks prior and to gain voting rights for African Americans. Upon arriving at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, the marchers were met with dogs, spiked hoses, billie clubs, and gushing fire hoses. Several hundred people were taken to the one black hospital in Selma suffering severe injuries. The entire event was broadcast to the world as 'Bloody Sunday' as an international broadcast was interrupted to cover the story. As a result, on August 6, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1965 Voting Rights Act protecting the rights of African Americans to register to vote.

I've seen many famous bridges. I was not at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma March 7, 1965. Five days and fifty-four miles later, something happened. No bridges were burned, people were maimed, hearts were broken, the world looked on the racism in the US, six hundred folks stood together with courage and bravery, some justice occurred, souls were convicted, evil resounded around the world, but no bridges were burned. Not that day.