



HUDSON – John Filippidis, silver-haired family man, business owner, employer and taxpayer, is also licensed to carry a concealed firearm.

He'd rather he didn't feel the need, "but things aren't like they used to be. The break-ins, the burglaries, all the crime. And I carry cash a lot of the time. I'm constantly going to the bank.

"I wanted to be able to defend my family, my household and the ground I'm standing on. But I'm not looking for any trouble."

Filippidis keeps his gun — a palm-sized Kel-Tec .380 semiautomatic, barely larger than a smartphone in a protective case — in one of two places, always: in the right-hand pocket of his jeans, or in the safe at home.

"There are kids in the house," Filippidis says, "and I don't think they'd ever bother with it, but I don't want to take any chances."

He's not looking for any trouble, after all.

Trouble, in fact, was the last thing on his mind a few weeks back as the Filippidises packed for Christmas and a family wedding in Woodridge, N.J., so he left the pistol locked in the safe. The state of Florida might have codified his Second Amendment rights, but he knew he'd be passing through states where recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions affirming the rights of individuals to keep and bear arms have been met by hostile legislatures and local officials.

"I know the laws and I know the rules," Filippidis says. There are, after all, ways gun owners can travel legally with firearms through hostile states. "But I just think it's a better idea to leave it home."

So there the Filippidises were on New Year's Eve eve, southbound on Interstate 95 — John; wife Kally (his Gulf High sweetheart); the 17-year-old twins Nasia and Yianni; and 13-year-old Gina in their 2012 Ford Expedition — just barely out of the Fort McHenry Tunnel into Maryland, blissfully unarmed and minding their own business when they noticed they were being bird-dogged by an unmarked patrol car. It flanked them a while, then pulled ahead of them, then fell in behind them.

"Ten minutes he's behind us," John says. "We weren't speeding. In fact, lots of other cars were whizzing past."

"You know you have a police car behind you, you don't speed, right?" Kally adds.

Says John, "We keep wondering, is he going to do something?"

Finally the patrol car's emergency lights come on, and it's almost a relief. Whatever was going on, they'd be able to get it over with now. The officer — from the Transportation Authority Police, as it turns out, Maryland's version of the New York-New Jersey Port Authority — strolls up, does the license and registration bit, and returns to his car.

According to Kally and John (but not MTAP, which, pending investigation, could not comment), what happened next went like this:

Ten minutes later he's back, and he wants John out of the Expedition. Retreating to the space between the SUV and the unmarked car, the officer orders John to hook his thumbs behind his back and spread his feet. "You own a gun," the officer says. "Where is it?"

"At home in my safe," John answers.

"Don't move," says the officer.

Now he's at the passenger's window. "Your husband owns a gun," he says. "Where is it?"

First Kally says, "I don't know." Retelling it later she says, "And that's all I should have said." Instead, attempting to be helpful, she added, "Maybe in the glove [box]. Maybe in the console. I'm scared of it. I don't want to have anything to do with it. I might shoot right through my foot."

The officer came back to John. "You're a liar. You're lying to me. Your family says you have it. Where is the gun? Tell me where it is and we can resolve this right now."

Of course, John couldn't show him what didn't exist, but Kally's failure to corroborate John's account, the officer would tell them later, was the probable cause that allowed him to summon backup — three marked cars joined the lineup along the I-95 shoulder — and empty the Expedition of riders, luggage, Christmas gifts, laundry bags; to pat down Kally and Yianni; to explore the engine compartment and probe inside door panels; and to separate and isolate the Filippidises in the back seats of the patrol cars.

Ninety minutes later, or maybe it was two hours — “It felt like forever,” Kally says — no weapon found and their possessions repacked, the episode ended ... with the officer writing out a warning for speeding 71 mph in a 55 mph zone.

“All that time, he's humiliating me in front of my family, making me feel like a criminal,” John says. “I've never been to prison, never declared bankruptcy, I pay my taxes, support my 20 employees' families; I've never been in any kind of trouble.”

Face red, eyes shining, John pounds his knees. “And he wants to put me in jail. He wants to put me in jail. For no reason. He wants to take my wife and children away and put me in jail. In America, how does such a thing happen? ... And after all that, he didn't even write me a ticket.”

Even now, John Filippidis has no idea how the officer learned about his concealed-carry permit, and the MTAP isn't saying.

Now, despite having fielded apologies from the officer's captain as well as from a Maryland Transportation Authority Police internal affairs captain, John is wondering if he shouldn't just cancel his CCW license.

For a guy who's not looking for trouble, that's not an unreasonable conclusion. And it would please fans of gun control by any means. But let's hope John Filippidis, American family man, taxpayer and good guy, doesn't cave, because it would be a sad statement about the brittleness of our guarantees — some would call them sacred — under the Constitution.