



WALLY BYAM CARAVAN CLUB INTERNATIONAL, INC.

# **BLUE BERET**

PUBLISHED BY AIRSTREAM AND WBCCI

SEPTEMBER 1975



**Let's reminisce with Helen . . .**

(THE WBCCI FROM 1955-1975)

See story on page 8



# Grand Lady of Trailering

## Recaps 20 Years With Club

By Helen Byam Schwamborn



What an assignment you gave me! How does one cover twenty years of history in a single story . . .

There are so many stories to tell: being one of the founding members of the WBCCI and the Wally Byam Foundation, my years on the Airstream Board of Directors, establishing the first WBCC headquarters office.

Also, doing the first WBCC International Rally, towing a trailer the first time, leading a caravan the

first time, being the first editor of the *Blue Beret*.

Or, my tales of writing for the *Caravanner* since 1955, doing the first caravan and club directory, writing the Club's first history in 1965, compiling its first song book in 1965.

Or, the many rallies, the many caravans, and on and on—each a story unto itself.

Suffice it to say, it has been 20 years filled with pioneering adventure, provocative challenges, orderly commotion and wild confusion.

It has been 20 years of happy achievements and unhappy disappointments; 20 years in which I have amassed an incredible number of memorable experiences and a host of devoted and true-hearted friends. I have had the additional privilege of being associated with a distinguished and forward-moving company. It has been a rewarding 20 years!

Many have asked why an office in Bakersfield. Quite simple—Wally wanted to get all the Way of Life activity (including the *CARAVANNER*) away from the factories. He wanted me to head that division. My home was in Bakersfield and I didn't want to move (home, family, friends), so the office was

established here.

In 1955 when Wally asked me to lead the first WB caravan to Eastern Canada, I had never been on a caravan and had never towed a trailer.

My trailering experience had been limited to weekends at the beach and short trips via Airstream. Wally said there was nothing to towing an Airstream, that anyone who could drive a car could tow one, and that I was enough of a "Byam" to lead the caravan—whatever that meant.

When he and Stella (his wife) left the caravan at its rendezvous point to scout the first (1956) caravan to Europe he said, "One thing I want you to do on this caravan is to get a WB Club started. These people are driving me nuts, always wanting to go somewhere."

The organization of the club is history, as is the first caravan to Europe which was highlighted by the International Caravan Club Rally held in Perpignan, France. The first WBCC International Rally was patterned after the European internationals. It was put on by Airstream in honor of Wally's birthday—July 4.

Chuck Manchester and I did  
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### COVER PHOTO

Stella Byam, Wally Byam, and Helen Byam Schwamborn (left to right) celebrate Wally's birthday in eastern Canada. The photo was taken on July 4, 1955—the year the WBCCI was formed by Wally.



## 20 Years . . .

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practically all the work for that rally. We had the backing of Art Costello and Andy Charles, (presidents of Airstream), and guidance from Wally, but the weeks of planning and pursuing it to its successful end was up to Chuck and me.

We were the ones who flew in and out of the Ozarks making contacts, contracts and arrangements. We were the ones who obtained flags of every nation, arranged for the big birthday cake, the entertainment by Red Foley, the telephone that was installed on the grounds, and all the other chores.

In the beginning Wally led all the caravans. The first deviation was in 1955 when I led Eastern Canada. Then in 1956, while Wally and I were both on the European caravan, he asked Pop Riley to take the caravan to Western Canada. Pop had been with Wally on the '54 caravan to Western Canada.

Until 1960, when Charlie Kiefer was hired to lead caravans, they had been sort of divided between Wally, Art, Andy and me.

I went all the way on eight caravans and was along for part of the way on at least that many more—like either starting or meeting groups who went to Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Europe, Africa and Round-the-World.

There were years of detail work on the Africa and the Round-the-World tours. We were inundated with stacks of mail, bulletins, charts, maps, etc. All the time we were "doing" caravans to other countries, we were working on the two biggies.

During all this time, I was also handling the administration of the club work, the club news and club and caravan stories for the *Caravanner* (just like today). The *Blue Beret* was mailed from Bakersfield until the move to Cerritos in 1973, so another little chore was furnishing a current list of names, addresses and numbers to the mailing house.

In the beginning I operated with a portable typewriter and a portable file, then took over one room in my home and hired a gal to help.

When the operation outgrew the room, we moved—ending up in a seven-room house. We bought a Sears aluminum storage house to take care



Helen was a one-girl office staff back in 1959 when this photo was taken. Wally kept her jumping with different assignments and responsibilities in the Club's early days.

of the supplies for the club—berets, flags, etc. We had all the paraphanelia necessary to service the ever-growing units. Wrapping and mailing the packages alone was a monumental job.



There was always time for fun at rallies and in this photo taken at the Palm Springs Rally in 1958, guess who's talking everyone into "hoola-hooping"? That's right, Helen Schwamborn.

By now the permanent office staff had grown to seven gals and we were a steady Manpower customer for extra help. We did all the mimeographing of bulletins and flyers for the various units. We put out the annual directory, took care of memberships, collected dues, assigned numbers, etc. When it came "International" time we did all the detail work—bulletins, reservations, correspondence, program.

For an added service we started the Wally Byam Courier Service, a mail forwarding service. We had to give this up due to lack of space and personnel.

Now, the club and caravan headquarters is in Cerritos and I have made the dizzy circle and look back with extraordinary pleasure and inoffensive pride on the achievements of both organizations.

I wish Wally could have lived to enjoy this part of his dream which has, "provided an endless source of friendships, travel fun and personal expressions."

In conclusion, researching for the Special Edition—1975, and rummaging through my memories for this personal review, has made me somewhat of a fact-grubbing historian which I have found utterly enjoyable.