

Newlywed couple on caravan holiday

By **MARGARET FOSMOE**

Tribune Staff Writer

SOUTH BEND

It'll make for a great story to tell the grandkids.

On their honeymoon, Mike and Terri Orchard traveled to another country, met new people and spent their days ... counting Airstream travel trailers?

"The people are so nice. I never met an Airstreamer I didn't like," said Mike Orchard, 30.

Documenting Airstream travel trailers has been Mike's hobby since he was 6 years old.

With clipboards and pencils in hand, the newlyweds from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, have spent the past six days wandering about the Wally Byam Caravan Club International rally at the University of Notre Dame.

For each trailer, they write down the vehicle's identification number, the license plate number and place of origin.

While Mike was growing up in Nova Scotia, Airstream caravans passed through his town each year. The caravans made a big impression on the boy.

"I met a lot of people. I decided I'd try to keep track of the people I knew," said Mike, who started making a list in 1966.

Each Airstream vehicle is marked with a vehicle identification number. So far, Mike has seen and documented about 9,000 of the

Terri and Mike Orchard spend their honeymoon writing down the numbers of Airstream travel trailers at the Wally Byam Caravan Club International Annual Rally.

more than 30,000 Airstreams worldwide.

The Canadian documents Airstream sightings like some people keep baseball statistics. He has notebooks full of figures.

With a flip of a page, he can tell you how many of the trailers he sighted within a particular sequence. For example, he's seen 20 of the trailers numbered 1100-1199.

"It's hard, because not all the numbers are active anymore," he said.

He has a meticulous list of the caravans he's seen — by year, number in the caravan and location.

The notebooks are sprinkled with color photos of Airstream vehicles.

To a novice, one shiny silver aluminum trailer probably looks

pretty much like the next. But to a connoisseur like Mike, each trailer has unique appeal.

He isn't sure which holds more attraction — documenting the trailer numbers or meeting the people inside. "It's a little of both," he said.

Mike and Terri met 3½ years ago in Edmonton.

See COUPLE /Page A13

MORE BYAM

■ Wally Byam's childhood prepared him well for the life he led, according to a couple in the current caravan. **Page B1.**

■ Byam caravaners are having quite an impact on businesses in the area around Notre Dame. **Page C9.**



Tribune Photo/ MICHAEL CLEVEN

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COUPLE

from Page A1

"I had never even heard of an Airstream before," recalled Terri, 31.

Shortly after they started dating, Mike confessed his hobby and Terri started helping him.

"I still call it his unique hobby," she said.

The couple was married June 23 in Gillette, Wyo. They planned the date around attending the rally at Notre Dame. The witnesses at their wedding were Airstreamers.

And, yes, the couple spent their honeymoon night in an Airstream.

The Orchards don't own an Airstream trailer, although they plan to someday. The couple stayed in a motel here.

Mike longs for a 34-footer, which carries a price tag in the \$40,000 to \$50,000 range. The purchase could be five or ten years down the road.

Meanwhile, his work never ends. Each trailer sighting requires changing seven or eight statistics.

"After an international rally, you have 3,000 numbers. It'll take months and months," said Mike, with a look of anticipation.

Local hobbyist Jack Corle fascinated with unique campers

Susan Corkum Greek

Lighthouse staff

LUNENBURG — To another audience, Mike Orchard's habit of recording the numbers of Airstream trailers he's seen might have seemed a bit odd. But not to members of the Wally Byam Caravan Club.

The caravanners, in town last week as part of an annual Maritime tour, loved leafing through Mr. Orchard's meticulously-kept binders in search of their own trailer numbers.

"I've got well over 11,000," Mr. Orchard told the 33-member group assembled in the Lunenburg Community Centre following a communal breakfast August 19. In fact, after picking up three new numbers among this 17-unit group, he has just 3,414 trailers left to see.

Mr. Orchard's "unique hobby" began 30 years ago when, as a six year old, he became fascinated with the glistening silver trailers that packed the town's exhibition grounds.

"The caravans were a really big deal in those days," he said. Up to 300 units would fill the athletic field, plus the parking lots on Knickle Road, Victoria Road and the community centre grounds.

The entourage would be welcomed by a delegation of town officials, including the mayor and police chief, and there was always an evening of entertainment, including musicians and magic by Lunenburg's own Johnny Cornu.

Mr. Orchard said he still has "vivid memories" of sitting on the old grandstand, watching and waiting for the caravans to arrive. "I used to sell them blackberries and raspberries and they usually invited me into their trailers for a drink or a Coke.

"The people were so friendly and they were from all over," he recalled. To a little boy whose only knowledge of places such as California came from television shows like the Beverly Hillbillies, it was "all very exciting."

In 1966, Mr. Orchard began recording the numbers assigned by Wally Byam Caravan Club International and found on the rear of each Airstream trail. The practice continued as he grew up and later moved out West. "Everywhere I go, I'm on the lookout," he said.

As a member of the Alberta-Saskatchewan chapter of the Wally Byam Club, Mr. Orchard, now owner of an Airstream that's still in Calgary, has travelled to several international rallies, including one at Huntsville, Alabama, earlier this year.

In addition to the caravan numbers, he records the licence plates of both the trailers and hauling vehicles, the member's home state and the number of times he's seen the unit.

"Here's ours," said Jack Corle, the Ohio resident who, together with his wife Sue,



Jack Corle, head of the Wally Byam Caravan Club, is seen in Lunenburg last week as he searched through Mike Orchard's binders in search of the number on a boy growing up in Lunenburg. To date, he has found 3,414.

was leading last week's caravan. "And look, he's seen us four times!"

Mr. Orchard also keeps Airstream photo albums. Although he admitted the pictures may look similar, he claimed the trailers are "quite individualistic. There are people who travel a long time and they model them to suit their personality," he said.

Once known as the Cadillac of recreational vehicles, Airstream owners still claim they are the only way to travel.

"This is the most relaxing vacation we've ever had," said Verna Bartel, a first-time caravanner who grew up in Saskatchewan but now hails from Indiana. "Everything is planned out for you (and) we've made so many friends."

Caravanner Mary Gilbert of California said her mother and father, now 85 and 86 respectively, still go touring after 32 years. "Every year my mother sends out 250 Christmas cards and she gets nearly as many back. There's so many, they fill a basket and many have notes inside."

"People do keep in touch," said Mr. Corle, who called it "one of the joys of caravanning."

The group, which left Lunenburg for Halifax August 20, will continue around Nova Scotia and on to Prince Edward Island where the caravan will disperse at Charlottetown on September 5. It's been together since July 15.

Wally Byam caravanners enjoy county

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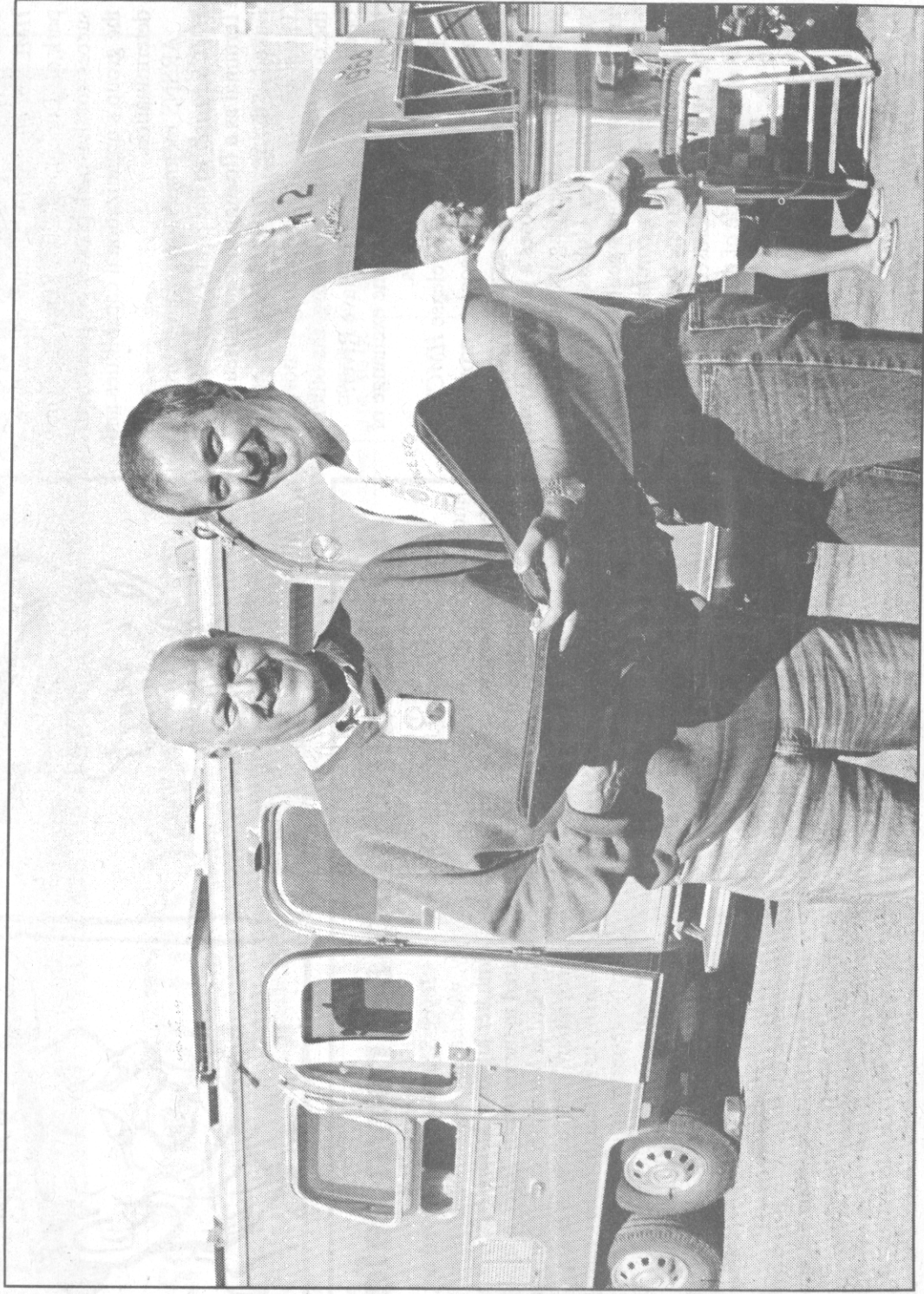
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Susan Corkum-Greek photo

Jack Corle, head of the Wally Byam Caravan group that visited Lunenburg August 17-20, leafs through one of Mike Orchard's binders in search of the number on his Airstream trailer. Mr. Orchard started recording trailer numbers as a young boy growing up in Lunenburg. To date, he's seen and recorded over 11,000 trailers. In fact, he says he has just 3,414 left to go.

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