

Eulogy for Helen Byam Schwamborn

1904 - 2004

In the September 1975 *Blue Beret*, the Wally Byam Caravan Club's house organ, Helen's comment on being asked to recap the 20 years of the Club, said, "What an assignment you gave me! How does one cover twenty years of history in a single story ...?"

Helen, how do we cover 99 years? Start at the beginning...

Helen's father Ray Byam was born in Iowa and raised in Baker, Oregon. Her Mother was born and reared in the Oklahoma Territory on an Indian Reservation. Her maternal grandfather was an Indian Agent and former Texas Ranger.

Sibling rivalry was apparent. Her older sister Mary never did anything wrong, and Helen was always being reminded of her free spirit.

Her childhood was memories of spending time with her Grandparents. Malvina and Loren Byam. She passed on the stories that Granddad told her of the Civil War. Her son Dale asked if she had ever sat in Abraham Lincoln's lap.

She and her sister, Mary, waited for the winter freeze. The two of them went to the clothesline, took down their Grandfather's frozen long johns and danced around.

Or the new little guy from England, the little Atkins boy, who she chased through the neighborhood clutching her man eating bantam rooster.

In the children's choir, Helen was always ready with the chorus, "Nero my dog has fleas" (Nearer My God to Thee).

After graduation from high school she moved to Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. She went to work doing office work. An introduction through mutual friends she met Henry Schwamborn. This led to marriage. The depression came. They were proud of the fact that even with high unemployment they remained employed. She was also proud that her frugal upbringing managed these lean years.

Helen and Henry moved to California in the thirties. They eventually settled down in Laguna Beach.

Helen became a member of the Ebell Club and eventually the president. As a social club they studied the fine arts, volunteer work for the community, and participated annually in preparing set decorations for the Pageant of the Masters.

In 1938, their son Dale was born. He was their pride and joy.

The war came and the Schwamborn family moved to Long Beach. Henry too young for the First World War, and too old for the second went into the defense effort.

After the war plus a few years, found the family living in Bakersfield. Helen worked for the Kern County Probation Department.

Throughout the years she kept in contact with her cousin Wally Byam. Wally was the founder and owner of Airstream Trailers. In 1951 he had his first caravan to Mexico and Central America. Then to Canada, and back to Mexico.

In 1955 the plans were set to have the first Eastern Canadian Caravan. A conflict arose how can Wally run the caravan, and be in Europe scouting the 1956 Caravan? Simple, ask his Helen to take over for him. She did. (As she put it, I “dood it.”)

This ushered in the Airstream era.

Wally Byam told his “little cousin”, as he fondly called her, that there was nothing to towing a trailer, if you can drive a car, you can tow a trailer. Besides that he told her, you’re a “Byam.”

Helen towed a trailer for the first time, lead a Caravan the first time, and was one of the founding members of the WBCCI and the first editor of the *Blue Beret*.

She established the first WBCC headquarters office, was a charter member of the Wally Byam Foundation, years on the Airstream Board of Directors and did the first WBCC International Rally.

From the Bakersfield office, Airstream owners went to Cuba, Canada, Mexico, Africa, Europe, and Around the World and throughout the United States.

Helen wrote prolifically in Airstream’s *Caravaner*, Airstream’s mass mailed newspaper. Tales of travel, places to go and you can take you Airstream with you. There are other firsts, the Caravan and Club directory, the club’s first history, compiling the first songbook.

When Wally passed away the Wally Byam Foundations was formed. From this Helen made worked with the board to successfully launch Caravan America. American Diplomats, Foreign Diplomats, journalists, members of the German parliament, individuals for the Japanese Diet, Each group toured a different part of the United States. They went home or to their assignments with knowledge of Grassroots America.

Fitting Wally Byam’s trailer number was #1, and Helen’s was #2.

In 1966 the only love of her life crossed the bar. Henry went on ahead to make reservations for her to reunite with him

Retirement

After Helen’s retirement she volunteered to work with the Kern County Welfare Department. She read to the blind, drove those that had no transportation, went to stores and purchased items as needed for the shut-ins. And most important she brought her hope of tomorrow to them. Her joy, happiness and love were shared with each of her assignments.

She rang the silver bells at Christmas for the Salvation Army.

At eh Kern County Pioneer Village she was a docent.

Helen always had time for her weekly bridge games. For forty years the “gals:” had fun trumping each other.

Her traveling went on. Her new journeys took her to China, Australia, the South Pacific, Mexico, Alaska, Hawaii, eastern block countries, the Soviet Union, Ireland, the Greek Islands and more. She cruised, flew, bussed, and used all available transportation to get to, and to go to during this period.

To travel 99 years means to bear witness to change.

Helen was born into a world that was ever changing.

Horses gave way to automobiles.

Slate tablets became computers.

Tongue depressors became MRI.

Unpaved streets became interstate highways.

Trains gave way to supersonic aircraft.

Let's travel a years with Helen on her journey to today.

Please join me in the celebration of Helen's life, a person who lived with positive thinking and humor second to none.

Helen was an amazing person who lived in an amazing time. From the turn of the 20th Century to the turn of the 21st her world saw man take to the air and man travel in outer space. Her personal life was one of growth, challenges and change.

1904

Helen Byam was born on August 8, 1904 in Baker, Oregon.

A few other things happened in 1904. Of course she couldn't know it at the time, but Gillette invented his safety razor, fingerprints as a forensic science came to be, and the New York subway had its first run.

Wilbur Wright made his first flight, too. If he hadn't, well, Helen would have walked, driven, choo-chooed, or sailed across the sea to make arrangements and conduct business. She was just that way.

Her religious upbringing was a mainstay throughout her life. In her last months she asked an old friend if he had been to church that morning. When he answered, No, she said, "Well.... I've been twice, here on my radio. It's all QUITE nice, you know. You should listen sometime."

1920

In 1920 when Helen was 16 she graduated from high school. Prohibition was in effect-- no more martinis for the farmers of Baker, Oregon. The first armored car was invented that year, and the VERY first mechanical rabbit for dog racing. \

Also on the scene in 1920 we find the Baby Ruth candy bar, the Good Humor ice cream bar. Don't forget Godiva chocolates. Sweet Sixteen!

Metered mail started, and just in time. The thousands and thousands of mailings Helen did for the Caravan Club depended on quick postage...WOW...the rallies, the overseas Caravans, the Blue Beret Newsletter, Club functions, memberships and general correspondence, all really impossible without metered mail.

The vote for women, the 19th amendment, ushered in a new light for the better half. Helen never missed an election-- whether it was for President or for dogcatcher.

1927

Wedding bells rang in 1927 when John Henry Schwamborn said his vows with Helen Elmore Byam. Elmore--and you thought you knew Helen!

1927 was their year. Did they care that Clarence Birdseye brought out frozen food, that the Model A replaced the Model T, that Grumman's Chinese Theater opened its doors, or that Charles Lindbergh flew to Paris?

Nothing equaled their year. He called her Babe and she called him her Love. Their love was alive and still is, reunited here in these beautiful Memorial Gardens.

1938

Helen's mainstay came on the market this year...instant coffee. Up early on a tour, a hotel room, or even at home...boil the water, stir the crystals, and take a shot of wake-me-up.

Born in 1938 were Natalie Wood, Jon Voight, Kenny Rogers and Evil Knieval. 1938 also saw the first nylon products, the first seeing eye dog, the appearance of Superman, Bugs Bunny, Red Ryder, the ball point pen, color TV, and Irving Berlin's *God Bless America*.

In this world Helen and Henry wanted a child, and in 1938 their son, Dale, was born. Their love and joy for him grew and endured through the years, and he returned their love. They watched him grow from diapers to long pants, from high school to University, from the Army to the world of business. She listened, comforted, and advised. She never, never had a discouraging word for those looking for encouragement, and she always had the right words and emotions.

1955

In 1955 Disneyland opened, the first microwave oven was sold, polio vaccine and the Frisbee were invented, and Elvis Presley ascended the charts.

The board game "Scrabble" debuted, a game she enjoyed with her daughter-in-law Susan, her niece Shelly, and friends. All memorable.

Helen was politically active, and she was delighted in 1955 when --as a child of God and with love for Jesus--she read that Congress voted that all American coins bear the motto "In God We Trust."

In 1955 Helen's cousin Wally Byam invited her to join the Airstream Trailers board and organize the Caravans and Clubs. She led Caravans, she went around the world. A true world traveler.

1955 was a very good year.

1967

In 1967 Dale married Susan Elaine Maki. As Helen acquired years, Dale and Susan called, and visited as often as they could. She was never a forgotten Mother.

1979

Music that year “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” played big, Ronald Reagan announced his candidacy for President, and Great Britain elected a woman as Prime Minister. Helen thought “Ronnie” was the greatest, and she had equal admiration for Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady.

This year ushered in Helen’s retirement. Retirement for this 75-year-old meant traveling, volunteer work, bridge, and being with her family. But first some more travel. In January the United States and China made up. Three months later Helen, Dale and Susan, and friends left on a three-week tour of China.

More than twenty years past with friends and loved ones nearby.

Helen gave of herself and valued people. We treasure her friendly greeting, bright optimism, and upbeat disposition. She will be missed, but never forgotten.