

Performance Recognition before Its Time, an Insight about Helen Byam Schwamborn

There have been many writings about Helen Byam Schwamborn, my Mother. The personal side first, she was my Mother. If this was the only side of her life, she did her child rearing with excellence.

During her almost one hundred years, Helen excelled in so many facets of her life. What was her greatest achievement? My-oh-my, that is like selecting a favorite song, a special meal, a clothing combination, a book, an international city or a favorite quotation from the Bible.

I want to explore one aspect of her persona that made everything possible.

It was aptly brought out at her Memorial Service in Bakersfield that, *"She never met a stranger!"* She never did.

Helen had an outgoing cheerful, friendly and acceptance when meeting and working with people, this made enduring friendships. You were welcomed into her life.

At work, she was the one to go to lunch with, to play a practical joke with or on. You also knew she was always there for you, and you could discuss your personal thoughts with her. She never gossiped. Anything discussed with her always was held in strictest confidence. She was your friend.

Part of her life was one of laughter. She had a wicked sense of humor, ranging from immediate events, to jokes of class, and even sometimes blue; but always humorous and in good taste.

Helen was always, always a person to have fun with and be around.

Religion was a personal part of her life. She woke every morning thanking God for the day ahead of her. Moreover, she knew that upon her death that would join Jesus Christ in Heaven. These were her beliefs. She was never an evangelist, but did share her beliefs with like-minded friends. There is no doubt that her personal beliefs added to her kindness and goodness in life.

It was a natural for her selection by her cousin, Wally Byam to join the Airstream Family.

The Byam family and the Schwamborn family became close after Henry and Helen Schwamborn, in 1930, moved from Pennsylvania to California. They celebrated holidays together and went camping.

In 1955, Wally asked Helen to sub for he and his wife Stella on the 1955 Wally Byam Eastern Canadian Caravan. Wally and Stel left for Europe.

Helen was on a leave of absence from her position with the Kern County Probation Department. She never returned to the Department.

Her immediate duties in 1955 were to lead the Caravan. She did. Wally asked her to work with the Airstream owners to form a Club. She did. The amazing Wally Byam Caravan Club comes into existence. Helen became the organizing brains and brawn developing the Headquarters and the support system to maintain the Club.

Talking about her feats is like talking about the legendary journeys of Odysseus in the Odyssey.

Under the tutelage of Wally, she blossoms into the consummate businesswoman, and leader.

Helen learned how to tow an Airstream. She towed for tens of thousands of miles, crossing the United States too many times to count. She towed #2 (her Airstream number) to Europe, Canada, and Mexico. Often she traveled with her son, a niece, or a friend. However, she did all of her towing and driving, almost unheard of for a woman of the 1950's and 1960's.

Wally Byam Caravanners reminisced for years to come about her leadership and organization on Caravans.

The Wally Byam Caravan Headquarters guided the unprecedented growth of a single product RV club, the Wally Byam Caravan Club. The Airstream owners benefited by a national organization, with regional leadership, and localized units. Major worldwide Wally Byam Caravans took shape in Bakersfield, California. First at the Schwamborn home on Lindora Street, and then a standalone office at 822 Niles Street.

Many Caravans went to Mexico, Central America, and Canada, but there were three major Caravans in the early days. Just think of the 1956 European Caravan, the 1959 African Caravan from Cape Town to Cairo, and the 20,000-mile Around-the-World Caravan in 1963, which went from Singapore to Lisbon. Unbelievable travel for Airstream owners. Truly amazing benefits of owning an Airstream. Helen was responsible for details and legwork required to launch these tours and give Airstream owners experiences non-peril in the annuals of travel.

Yes, there were other duties. As a writer and editor of *"the Caravanner"*, an Airstream newspaper, published to inform Airstream owners, Club members, Airstream dealers, and prospective Airstream buyers the on-goings for Caravans, Club events, and Airstream doings.

An overall position that most historians are unaware of about Helen, were her duties on the Airstream Board. She always captivated the board with her insights, and was considered a valuable participant in corporate discussions and decisions.

One of the longest ongoing projects was the Wally Byam Foundation. The Foundation's tenure was 15 years. One of the major projects was Caravan America. It introduced the United States to many overseas groups by traveling with Airstreams and GMC tow vehicles throughout our Nation. American diplomats also used the equipment their renewal introduction to the greatness of the United States.

Helen not only towed an Airstream, but she traveled by ship, and airplane on business throughout the World and the United States. Her hours and miles in the air are immeasurable. She negotiated with steamship lines, met with Ambassadors, Consular Generals, and tourist representatives from other Nations.

During the decades of 1950 and 1960, most women were secretaries, clerks or stay at home moms. There is some truth that a chauvinistic umbrella curtailed the advancement of women. Art Costello, former president and chairman of Airstream, paid her a left-handed compliment. "Helen you were born with the wrong plumbing." He meant this as recognition of her contributions to Airstream, in a world dominated by men.

Helen Byam Schwamborn excelled, achieved and was recognized for the work that she did during her 24 years with Airstream. Beatrice Foods had a retirement policy of 75 years of age. Therefore, Helen retired in 1979.

Helen's contribution not only formed an enduring Club, but also helped in building today's RV industry. Wally Byam laid the groundwork for the RV Industry; Helen carried his torch and organized the premier organization, the Wally Byam Caravan.

In the world of recognition of women, I believe her accomplishments were one of many that contributed to opening the doors for women in the corporate world, and upper management in companies.

There is attached a letter showing her responsibilities in preparation for the Around-the-World Caravan. She had traveled to New York to meet with the States Marine-Isthmian Agency to negotiate rates for the shipment of rigs to Asia, and then back to the U.S.A. from Europe.

Helen Byam Schwamborn did her job well. Thank you Mom, you were a wonderful Mother; an outstanding leader and organizer; a fantastic businesswoman; a terrific travel writer; and a friend to 10's of thousands of people throughout the world.

Thank you Mom.

Dale

AIR MAIL

June 15 deadline
for #9 vehicles

area code
212

CABLE ADDRESS: STATMARINE
DIGBY 4-8840

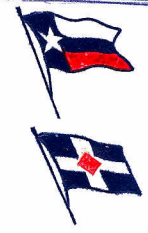
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States Marine-Isthmian

FEB 11 1963

Agency, Inc.

90 BROAD STREET, NEW YORK 4, N. Y.



February 8, 1963

Mrs. Helen Byam Schwanborn
822 Niles Street
Bakersfield, California

(W)

Dear Mrs. Schwanborn:

In accordance with our recent discussions in New York, I am pleased to forward you rates and general information covering your 1963/1964 "Westbound Around-the-world" and "European" Caravans.

Our Pacific Coast office has advised me that while they were unable to have the trailer tongue eliminated from Conference measurements they were able to have the classification of the trailers reduced from a \$ 63.50 to a \$ 47.25 weight or measurement rate. This would include all installed special equipment, personal effects, etc. that would normally be in your trailers.

The following is a schedule of rates as they stand today. As you can well imagine, these rates may conceivably change between now and a year-and-a-half from now. However, these rates are the best possible figures at the present time.

From	To	Automobiles	Trailers
Long Beach	-- Singapore	\$ 47.25 W/M	\$ 47.00 W/M
New York	-- Cadiz	42.75 W/M	42.75 W/M
	Naples	33.00 W/M	33.00 W/M
	Pieraus	33.00 W/M	33.00 W/M
Bremen	-- New York		
	(Conference) (States Marine)	* 22.00 W/M 36.00 W/M	36.00 W/M 36.00 W/M
Mediterranean Ports	-- New York	32.00 per cubic meter	32.00 per cubic meter
Spanish Ports	-- New York	50.00 per cubic meter	50.00 per cubic meter

* You will note that this \$ 20.00 rate is substantially below States Marine Lines rate of \$ 36.00. However, there is a "rate war" at the present time and in all probability, in late 1964, when this rate is required, it will be approximately the same as States Marine Lines rate.

In the event the utilization of Spanish ports becomes necessary, we can discuss Cadiz and Barcellona rates with you further.

I have discussed both the "Westbound Around-the-world" and "European" Caravans with all appropriate parties in our organization and there is general concurrence that no prohibitive factors are involved. We recognize that a substantial amount of coordination and timing will be required. Accordingly, it is our request that you keep us advised promptly of all progress and any new factors that may enter the picture. In particular, it is important that we know as soon as possible what passenger arrangements have been made, in order that our vessel allocation department can position the proper type of vessel for the "Westbound Around-the-world" Caravan sailing California for Singapore in late September, 1963.

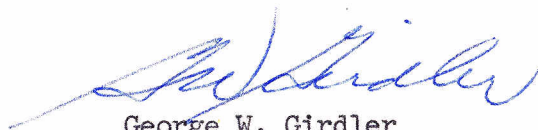
As soon as possible after February 20th, we should have a discussion to insure that all passengers are taken care of and if they are not, we can then determine how many can be accommodated on the vessel assigned for the carriage of the vehicles and trailers.

I am notifying all our West Coast offices by letter this date, to refer all independent bookings of vehicles and trailers from the U.S. to Singapore, to me for screening, in order that I may keep you advised.

I feel that it is best we defer naming ports in the Mediterranean at which "stragglers" or "drop-outs" may board vessels for return to New York until the "Around-the-world" Caravan is well on its way toward the Mediterranean. This is one area in which our service is frequent but rather irregular. It would therefore be unwise to give firm commitments at this time.

Mr. Stewart Danoff, President of Atlantis Shipping Inc., has been in frequent communication with us regarding coordination of vehicle bookings, passenger bookings, etc. Unless otherwise advised by you, we will continue to supply him with all possible information and cooperation.

Very truly yours,



George W. Girdler
Vice-President

GWG:DA