Wally, Me and Pee Wee

by Dale "Pee Wee" Schwamborn #00002

September 1951 my mother received a telephone call. "Hello, Helen, this is Wally. With your permission I want to take Dale on a week's hike in the Sierra Nevada's with two young boys, Stel and myself." My parents said yes. Wally picked me up and I joined Stella, Clive (17 years old), and his brother Gareth (15 years old) and we headed for Independence, California. Yep, I was the kid at twelve years of age. Clive and Gareth were sons of a good friend of Wally's.



Wally, Pike & Jenny

Wally hired a packer to carry provisions and camping equipment. This was a plus, the hike is something else.

Here I am, a flatlander walking through the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Some elevation statistics in sequence, Bakersfield 408 ft.; Independence 3,930 ft.; Onion Valley campground 9,193 ft.; Kearsarge Pass 11,760 ft.; Forester Pass 13,180 ft.; Whitney Portal 8,630 ft.; Lone Pine 3,727 ft.; we didn't go to the summit of Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the continental United States at 14,505 feet. Our seven day hike covered 48 miles on the John Muir Trail.

Looking back this was an observation test that Wally did for the evaluation of Dale Schwamborn. How did I react to severe conditions? Did I get along with Stella, Clive and Gareth? Who was Dale?

The first day out in Onion Valley I received my first lesson from Wally. I went to bed in my mummy completed clothed. In the morning I came out from my mummy bag cold, ice on the bag, and sleepless. Too cold! Wally pointed out that a mummy bag operates on the principle that your body heat warms the inside of the bag. Wearing clothes only restricts the body heat from keeping you warm. The next night and every night of my life it is undershorts, or nude. I can't remember the last time I used pajamas or even owned a pair.

Have you ever been in a group where you might be considered the odd person out? On this hike I was the one. I was the youngest. I was the shortest. Wally christened me Pee Wee. Yes this is the origin of my nickname. It has lasted now for 61 years. Do you want be called Pee Wee or Dale, this question happens at every Airstream function I attend? Pee Wee is a name I look at affectionately, a memory of the man, Wally Byam.

Something happened in the Sierras that became a standing joke for Wally, Stel and I on future trips. One evening I helped Stel get ready for dinner. Wally started the open fire, with wood gathered by Clive and Gareth. I fetched water poured it into a pot and Stel began making spaghetti for our dinner. She clocked the boiling time. Dinner's ready. Yes and no. What was in the pot was a clump, a gluttonous mass of wheat. We christened this dinner, "Stella Paste." Some actions in life pass by, but never, ever, did "Stella Paste."

Wally's evaluation of "Pee Wee" is he can put up with hardship, he gets along well with others older than himself, and he learns when instructed.

Wally wrote the Schwamborns in October 24, 1951 from Mexico City. In the greeting he said "Dear Helen, Heinie & Pee Wee." It was only a few weeks before that Wally dubbed me Pee Wee, and now it is established endearment to him.

This is the note from Wally, "Am down here winding up the final details on the Tour to Central America. Going to be a bigger success than I had at first planned. Have 165 people, 55 cars and 51 trailers. Just like a circus moving into town. Carrying our own light plant, cafeteria car, loud speaking system and tow truck. Have a big fiesta and fandango every night. Leave L.A. day after Thanksgiving. Hope to see you before then. Wally Byam"

Between October 24 when Wally was in Mexico and November 18, Wally discussed with my parents the possibilities of taking me on the Caravan.

In October or November 1951, Wally calls my parents and asks them if I can accompany him on his first Caravan. It is formally known as the *First Annual Inter-American Trailercoach Caravan Tour*. This meant permission to leave school for four months, a release from the eighth grade. Vaccinations, clearances from police department, and a passport.