

Yes, Sometimes I am the Lone Ranger



Vice-President Schneider

GIA offers spouses and families of BLE members support

By Becky Schneider, GIA-BLE International 1st Vice-President & National Legislative Representative

Hi yo, Silver, away!

Let's see if you recognize this scenario. Before you have had a chance to get a cup of coffee and begin your hectic day, your son yells down the stairs that the toilet isn't working. Your daughter tells you her schedule consisting of a science project due tomorrow that she "spaced," soccer practice after school, and the band recital scheduled for that evening (you knew about the soccer practice). Your son makes his way to the breakfast table asking if he remembered to tell you that he was responsible for the cookies for today's home room party. Of course, he did not. So begins your busy day.

Dressed for work, you try to remedy the bathroom situation and it's downhill from there. As you change clothes, a blood curdling scream makes its way up the stairs. Mid-buttoning, you race to see what disaster has struck only to find your daughter pointing to a spider on the wall. Once again, you don your hero's cape (and shoe) and do battle with the monster in your kitchen. Now it's off to school and work and the rat race begins again.

This scene could be 80 percent of the nation, but adding to the pressure of normal life is the fact that your spouse works for the railroad. We, as railroad families, have extra pressure because it is

often like being a single parent. The odds of the sky falling when your spouse is home are quite low. In fact, my experience has been that nothing ever happens when my husband is home. Luckily, our spouses chose well, and we are able to get through the daily grind.

Even though you are genuinely concerned, you are almost hesitant to ask your spouse "how was your trip?" Lack of concern by the Carriers to get the crews back home, compounded by the constant harassment, intimidation and lack of suitable working conditions usually make for some bad conversation. Yet, you listen because you know that a little venting is good for the soul of the one you love.

In my opinion, the worst part about being the spouse of a railroader is that little nagging fear always buried in the back of your mind that the day could come when they return home in an ambulance, or worse yet, not at all. I realize I am probably preaching to the choir, but it is a dangerous job and we all have to find ways to cope.

The GIA to BLE was formed 115 years ago, as a sisterhood to help out the BLE and provide some social interaction among others who understood just how crazy it was to be married to a railroader. Over the past 10 years, we have enhanced our organization by working even more closely with the BLE on issues that affect our daily lives through the creation of a legislative department that works hard to keep members informed of legislation that has direct impact on our families. We have also branched out to address quality of life and safety issues by bringing them to the attention of the public.

Of course, the greatest role of the GIA is still providing support to our fellow railroad spouses. Besides the ability to speak "railroadese," we understand the pressure and stress associated with living at the beck and call of an employer whose consideration of their employees and their families is less than admirable. We all need support groups in our lives, and our organization provides a sort of "extended family" to those who wish to help where we can in reducing the risks to our spouses on the job, and providing a loving environment to come home to.

We can, and are, making a difference. Outside of contractual issues, we are the best asset available to change the way the public and our elected representatives look upon the railroads' practices. I invite all engineers' spouses, mothers, fathers, and children 18 years and older who are interested in joining their voice with ours to contact us and help make a difference for ourselves and our families.

Visit the GIA Webpage online at www.ble.org. •



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