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Byron Nishkian

Born: 1916 Died: 1987

When Byron Nishkian was a small boy in San Francisco, he found he couldn't participate in Boy Scout summer trips into the Sierras because he was plagued by a violent susceptibility to poison oak. Instead, he went on winter ski trips to the Donner Summit.

Byron Nishkian was born in San Francisco, California, in 1916, and as a young man at the University of California, competed in hockey and figure skating.

His involvement with skiing began when he built a mountain home in 1948 at Wawona, near Badger Pass in Yosemite National Park. He, his wife Elly, and their three children, several dogs, and marvelous picnic lunches were on the Badger scene frequently. Byron began to officiate at ski meets as a member of the Yosemite Winter Club. It was this involvement in the "politics" of skiing that he launched his most important contributions to the sport.

Byron became the Yosemite Winter Club president in 1956, joining such greats as Hannes Schroll, Sigi Engl, Luggi Foeger, Charley Proctor, and Albert Sigal in assisting in Yosemite's ski programs. From this point forward, Nishkian's contributions to skiing were many and significant. While serving as a FWSA Board member, he established the Century Club (which grew into a sizeable group at \$100 each). Sparking the association's charter flight program, Byron became the FWSA president in 1958, serving in this capacity for three terms, and on the USSA board of directors.

As with most things western, skiing grew by giant strides. Byron formulated membership programs that resulted in the division's tremendous growth. During this time, he saw the need for and directed the appointment of the division's first fulltime executive director.

With the Squaw Valley Olympics (1960) in the planning stages, Byron was made a member of the organizing committee, contributing his administrative abilities and engineering skills to the winter games' planning.

According to Gloria Chadwick, during Nishkian's first years on the National Board, "He was one of the prime movers in the women's cross-country program, encouraging the USSA Executive Office and the Nordic Competition personnel to further organize a ladies' cross-country program."

Involved in and contributing to organized skiing at the national level, Byron was elected USSA president in 1965 at the Spokane convention, serving for three productive terms. Simply to list his contributions in the USSA's top office implies only a quantitative scale; it was the quality of his administration that must be regarded. In general, his efforts were in areas of membership development (The 'String Tag Program' instituted with the cooperation of the ski industry accounted in part for a 42% increase in membership); in competition, the revival of the prestigious Far West Kandahar which was first brought to the U.S. by Sir Arnold Lunn in the 1930s; the promotion of the NASTAR program; and in the historical field, he supported the funding of the National Ski Hall of Fame in Ishpeming, Michigan. Competition affairs as well reached a new plateau of organization.

He was involved with the F.I.S. on the international scene as a Delegate to the Congresses, but he, with his wife Elly, spent six months in 1975 planning for the XXX F.I.S. Congress in San Francisco, the first Congress ever held in the United States. From all reports, their efforts resulted in one of the most successful F.I.S. conclaves ever held.

Along a somewhat different road, Byron was involved as well in the engineering aspects of skiing. He, or his firm, did lift and other design work for such areas as Badger Pass, Alpine Meadows, Squaw Valley, Mt. Lassen, Rocky Mountain National Park, Homewood (Lake Tahoe), Sugar Bowl, Donner Ski Ranch, Harding Ice Field (Alaska), and the Sikkim Life Line and Chair Lift on the Tibetan border.

In June 1975, Byron Nishkian was honored with the Julius Blegen Award, the U.S.S.A's highest compliment, made to the member who has contributed outstanding service to the sport of skiing during the past year.

A retrospective look at Byron Nishkian's devotion and service to skiing is most impressive and one might muse over the state of the sport today if the young Byron had enjoyed immunity to poison oak. It might not have reached its present high level.

Byron Nishkian was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1976.