

Sue Hunter's memories of Bill

I first met Bill in 1963 at a meeting in his and Ray's flat in Huskisson Street. I remember him talking passionately about the latest betrayals by the leaders of the Labour Party – (does this sound familiar?). There were lots of Young Socialists there, listening keenly.

After he spoke there were questions and discussion, all quite intense; and then we had cups of tea and cakes baked by Ray, and friendly chats and jokes.

This was a pattern of all their meetings: Bill was serious but never solemn: he always had time for good conversation and a laugh afterwards.

His politics came from his home and upbringing in a small Durham mining village, where struggles for justice were a daily part of life.

He often told the story of how, when he was a boy, he came into the kitchen to find his mother crying – “with a tear in her eye” as he put it. She was counting the few coins left, saying “How am I going to feed the family?”

His parents, who were Methodists, were well-known for helping other people in the village. There would be queues in the parlour, waiting for advice. There is a scene in “Boys from the Blackstuff” reminiscent of this. The character played by Peter Kerrigan, a docker and long-time friend of Bill's, does the same service for his neighbours.

I lived in Wigan for many years so didn't see Bill on a daily basis, but he visited many times on his travels as a North West organiser. The great thing was, he called for a chat, not to give a political lecture, and I always cooked him bacon. You could say we bonded over bacon butties.

I also often visited Bill and Ray in Liverpool, where long discussions went on, always accompanied by cake, and interrupted by a succession of eccentric cats. Jinx could open door handles and would stroll into the middle of meetings, and sit on a surprised comrade's knee.

In those years I lacked a lot of confidence, and Bill would tell me I had no need to be so unassertive, “Don't apologise” he would say. I'm grateful to him for that.

As Bill became older and frailer, I got into a more caring role with him. We'd have friendly arguments, sing together and read poems.

I'm proud to have been his daughter-in-law, and will miss him very much.