

In Memoriam: Holly Stand

My mother, Hannelore (Holly) Stand, passed away on August 16 after a lifetime of engagement in the struggle for peace, equality and socialism. She was born into a Ruhr coal-mining community in 1924; her early life was marked by that community's revolutionary aspirations – and by the defeat of those aspirations. She left Germany in 1933 having witnessed the barbarism of fascism in power: Book burnings, arrests, brutal beatings, killings. Those of her family members who remained in Germany paid a heavy price during the years that followed for remaining true to their Communist convictions.

The United States was a refuge, but not a respite, from the harshness of the depression, the sacrifices of political struggle. Her parents were each deeply engaged in the anti-fascist and labor movements; her father as a miner then as a building maintenance worker, her mother as a domestic worker. As her parents organized, she was frequently uprooted; my mother attended 12 schools in 4 states over the course of 4 years. She was unable to complete high school when finally back in New York to stay in 1938; though that did not prevent her from becoming a well-read and well-educated person – nor from eventually getting her GED when my brother and I were in college.

My mother became politically active early in her own right, joining the Young Communist League and the Nature Friends – a workers' hiking group banned by the Nazis in Germany and listed as a subversive organization in the U.S. during the years of McCarthyism. It was within these groups that she built many of the friendships that would last a lifetime, and met my father Mille whom she married in 1943 just before he went overseas as a soldier during World War II. During the war, my mother worked in a garment factory, participated in Soviet War Relief efforts, and was involved in efforts to maintain an anti-fascist presence in the German-American community of Yorkville (in Manhattan).

Her activism continued after the war, especially in work on behalf of Vito Marcantonio and his American Labor Party Congressional campaigns, when redistricting designed to weaken him added portions of Yorkville to his East Harlem base. In the 1950s-60s, she and my father dedicated time and energy to Camp Midvale in New Jersey, a left-wing community that survived the height of Cold War anti-Communist hysteria. They also worked for many years as part of the editorial committee of the Communist Party-associated publication *German-American*, and for the (Social Democrat-inclined) Workmen's Benefit Fund. Their work with the WBF in the 1970s-80s was especially concerned with building housing for elderly German-immigrant domestic workers who, when forced to retire, often found themselves with no home, and no family to turn to. And for all the years of its existence, they were actively engaged in building solidarity with the German Democratic Republic.

The values my mother held, she lived. She wouldn't cross a picket line or buy a boycotted good, be it a Judy Bond dress or scab grapes. She was at the 1963 March

on Washington, supported school integration in our Bronx neighborhood. I remember walking “Ban the Bomb” picket lines in front of the United Nations with her when I was a child; and later with my own children, marching with her in protest of the first Gulf War in Washington DC. To the end of her days she was engaged; in the 1990s with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and these last years with the Unitarian church in Westchester, NY.

Living her values also meant that my mother always spoke her mind in the organizations to which she belonged, the socialist societies she supported. Her critical independence of thought meant that the pain she felt when the GDR and the Soviet Union collapsed – the pain of knowing how much so many sacrificed to build a better world – did not lead to disillusionment, did not lead to a sterile dogmatism, but rather to a search for what to learn, how to go forward.

Nonetheless, the early years of the 21st century were difficult ones for my mother. The Bush Administration’s glorification of war, justification of torture, the demagoguery and lies, all brought back memories of fascism. Obama’s election brought back new hope, a confirmation of the humane values of the people in the U.S. Yet she had no illusion that further progress would come easily or quickly.

Strong in her opinions, my mother was open-minded in ways important to us when we were growing up. She was brought up with a strong sense of the meaning and importance of family when a child in the Ruhr, only to see family ties disrupted again and again by the realities of repression and poverty in Germany, in the United States. For that reason she was especially devoted to her family, and was as fiercely committed to my father, to my brother and me, to her grandchildren and great grandchildren, as she was to the ideals for which she fought and lived. A deep and abiding commitment to her family, solidarity with all who labor, with all who work to make this a better world, formed the content of her life. She lives in the memory of those who knew her, she lives in the aspirations for a world of peace and justice.

Submitted to Portside by Kurt Stand

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