

Ken Lumb – Memories of a Remarkable Man.

In the following tribute to Ken Lumb, Anne Rae, reflects on the days of their youth, including sixties socials, UPIAS and beyond. The article also ends with contributions from Neville Strowger and Dorothy Whitaker.

40 years ago – in the sixty's – I met Ken Lumb. The only national organisation for disabled people then that wasn't impairment specific was the Disabled Drivers Association, which had a group in Manchester, meeting monthly for socials. We all drove invalid trikes, and puttered about in droves, driving other drivers up the wall with frustration in much the same way caravans do now.

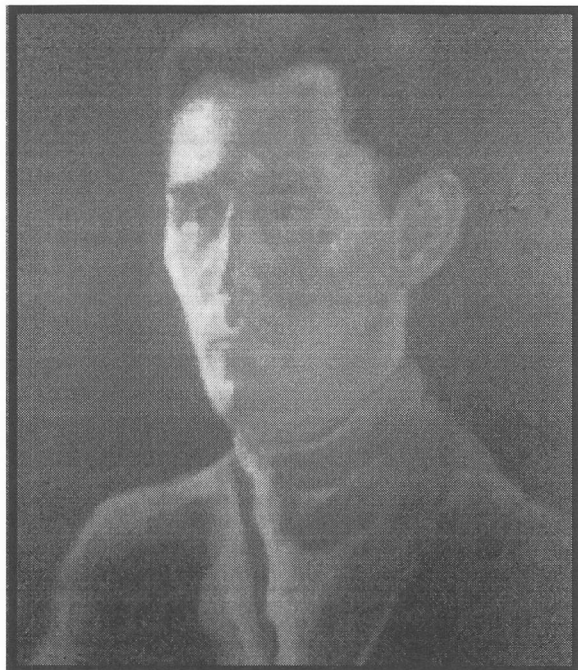
I lived up north then and was part of it – we were young, blissfully unpolitical, and loved a good party. Ken was a party animal – he absolutely loved picnics in the Pennines – drives out to New Brighton to meet up with his friend Alan Moseley, and weeks and long weekends at the DDA's hotel in Norfolk, where we met up with DDA members from London, all night parties where I lived; gathering at his parents home. Such a happy home. Mr. & Mrs Lumb always had tea and fruit cake on hand, or huge hotpots to share, and made Ken and Brian's friends so welcome. Brian was Ken's elder brother – so like Ken, but also so different; his impish smile could have lit up a dungeon, and when Brian died the loss to Ken must have been almost inconceivable.

Ken was an absolute master of practical jokes. Those of you who know anything about music probably are under the illusion that Phil Spectre invented the wall of sound. No, wrong, Ken Lumb did. One terrifying morning in Norfolk, 4 women sharing a bedroom were woken to the crashing chords of the National Anthem, Onward Christian Soldiers, She loves you, yeah yeah... Frightened out of our wits we searched the bedroom... the row was loudest near a chest of drawers... a wire ran out of the back, under the door, down the corridor, and, yes, under Ken's door. Oh, was he pleased with himself – all day.



Although we were pretty frivolous most of the time, I did notice that Ken had a serious side. He had a great friend called Fred Needham – Fred was much older than the rest of us – a sort of elder statesman of the DDA – and I often noticed Ken and Fred sitting apart from everyone – in the sunshine – it always seemed to be sunny in my memory – puffing on their pipes, Fred's old Scottie dog at their feet, talking a little, thinking, talking a bit more... I never did know what they talked about, but they looked to be pondering on mighty weighty matters. I also knew that Ken painted, but I only ever saw some of his abstract work – which meant nothing to me.

Looking at his portrait work at his memorial, I was thunderstruck – I had no idea just how good an artist he was.



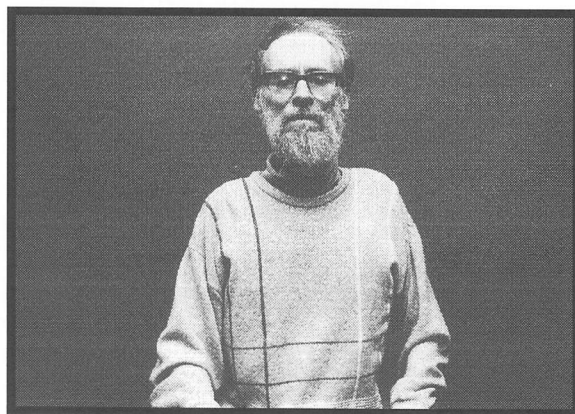
Then suddenly everything changed. Ken met Anne. Well, that was the rumour – but surely not? How could anyone called Lumb meet a girl called Plumb? Another of Ken's jokes? But no, it was true, and Ken left one happy family and started his own.

Anne and Hazel gave such moving and illuminating testimonials to an obviously dearly loved husband and father – despite their loss and grief, it was really possible to imagine what happiness had been present in their home.

Paul Hunt's letter raising the issue of disabled people segregated from society in institutions was printed in *The Guardian*. Such a wake up call... I answered it, but didn't really get involved until I moved back to London, and joined the by then founded Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, (aka UPIAS) which changed me, my life, and the direction of disability politics forever. Would we be here today, I wonder, if Paul had not written that letter?

...I heard that Ken had negotiated radical changes with disabled people in Rochdale; (see *Neville & Dorothy below*) that Hazel had arrived in the world, and that GMCDP had been established; all over the country organisations were being set up and controlled by disabled people... so much change.

When I moved back to Manchester, well, we were all serious people then, but the mature Ken was amazing. His humour was still there, but his wisdom and ability to analyse the increasing policies around disability in an accessible way was a revelation. It was clear that he had become a respected teacher of disability politics to other disabled people without seeming to be a teacher..... a rare gift. After I had come to know Ken Davis well, I realised how alike the two of them were – both quietly humorous, both unassuming, both self taught, and both totally dedicated to writing their thoughts clearly to share with us all, and, perhaps unconsciously, to create a lasting record for the future. Ken Lumb has certainly achieved that – he must have produced over 40 copies of the *Coalition* magazine, all full of some of the best writing on disability issues.



Ken's legacy to disabled people is all there, in those magazines, to be built on for the future. It is precious, and should be treasured along with the memory of Ken as a man who loved life, and his fellow disabled comrades, as he himself was loved.

For me, well, Ken was a bright thread running in and out of the fabric of my life, as he must have been for many people – I shall always miss him.

Neville & Dorothy continue Ken's story...

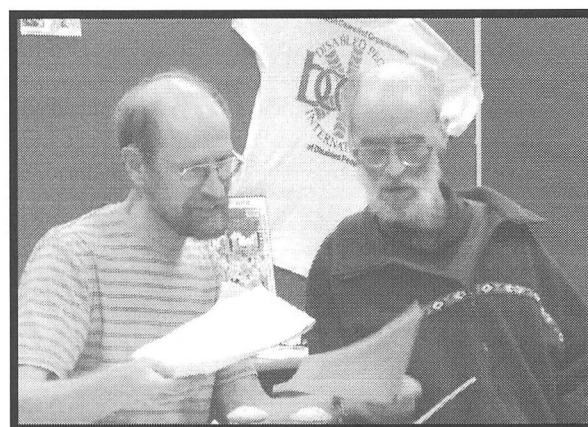
When we visited Ken in hospital a couple of weeks before he died, he greeted us with "I've been in a right pickle" – quite an understatement. The 'pickle' took me back to my first meeting with Ken in 1980, when we dined on home made Pickled Cabbage with Shepherds Pie – that was pre-vegetarian days. It also reminded us of Ken's selflessness as, although part of the pickle he referred to was his precarious health, his other major concern that evening was how the Coalition magazine could continue.

In 1980 Ken was the chair of the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) in Rochdale and I was a new Field Worker for the CVS in Gtr. Mcr., and part of my role was to promote the IYDPI (International Year of Disabled People) throughout the ten Boroughs. At a meeting at Ken's house, Ken made it quite clear that he would not be involved in anything that celebrated individuals or offered patronage; but if links across the County could reinforce some of the work that was already going on in Rochdale in terms of improved housing, access and information for disabled people, he might be interested. From then on we worked together on future developments – I used Ken very much as a 'consultant'.

The developments included a Gtr. Mcr. Housing and Disability Group, and the preface to the report of their major conference in 1982 starts with "The G.M. Housing and Disability Group arose when a local group of disabled people, led by Ken Lumb, put their case for supported independent living to a local organisation of housing associations".

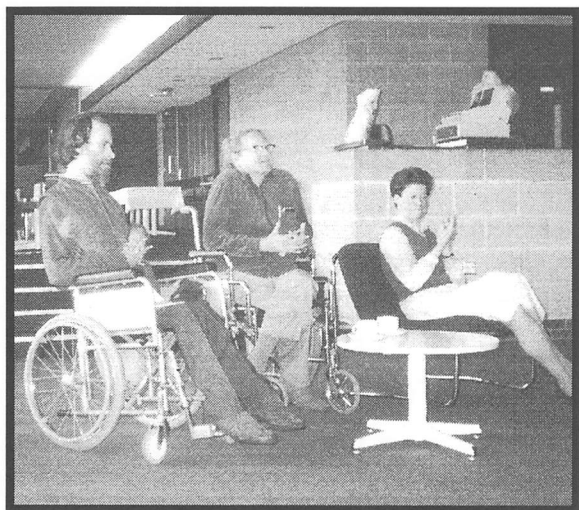
Included in the Group's video were interviews with disabled people who Ken had personally supported in their move from segregated residential institutions. The G.M. Highways and Disability Group followed the model of the Rochdale Group in campaigning for improved access to the ten townships; disabled motorists from as far as Wigan joined a protest convoy through Rochdale Town Centre; and although not a member of ADAPT (Action for Disabled Peoples Transport), Ken supported the final meeting with the Metro planners when the proposal for an 80% accessible system was increased to 100% ... Quite a legacy.

These Groups finished when their purpose was served, but the County links made through them, and the political analysis on disability issues agreed by the UPIAS members informed the philosophical basis when founding the GMCDP (Greater Mcr. Coalition of Disabled People) and I am sure many people will pay tribute to Ken's role in GMCDP elsewhere. However, in 1980 I met an angry young man at Salford CVS, who challenged me to prove anything worthwhile could come out of IYDP – his name was Kevin Hyett.



I persuaded him to go to Middleton and meet Ken. Their subsequent role in the development of the disabled peoples movement is well known. What is not so well known is that Ken was a co-founder of Crossroads in Rochdale and Kevin took that idea to Salford... another indirect legacy.

We obviously developed a lasting friendship. In recent years Neville would ring Ken, enquiring how the "Editor" was, and they would then discuss the birds in the garden, and football; although a Rochdale supporter, Ken loved Manchester City's Shaun Wright-Phillips.



We swapped seed potatoes for gooseberries, and Ken and Neville would swap their "Noddy Car" stories – such as Neville starting last in a Middleton Rally and coming in first only to be reminded by Ken that a Rally was not a Race! Ken enjoyed the arts and would often discuss the merits or otherwise of various venues, such as the cobbles at Tate Modern in Liverpool. During the last time we met Ken for lunch in November, he was wondering if he could get to see Leonard Cohen at the MEN Arena... he did not make it, so in conclusion, for an exceptional person, these are the opening lines to Cohen's poem 'There Are Some Men':

There are some men
Who should have mountains
To bear their names to time.
Grave-markers are not high enough or
green

Additional background information

Dorothy, employed by GMCVS whose chair was Alan Powell (Principal Lecturer in Youth and Community Dept., Mcr. Poly), who lived in Rochdale and had been chair of Rochdale Voluntary Action (CVS) prior to Ken. Alan suggested Dorothy should meet Ken... see above.

During 1980/81 Dorothy linked up with groups throughout the County and activists within these groups began to forge links through shared experiences of developments relating to Information; Transport; Housing and Support and Access and membership of UPIAS.

A number of these people formed the initial Steering Group for GMCDP., and Ken Lumb invited Ken Davis to the first meeting to talk about the Derbyshire Coalition. Ken Davis had already spoken at the G.M. Housing and Disability Conference, and he and Maggie feature in the video (see above)... again Ken Lumb was the catalyst for this valuable contact.

The Steering Group held a major conference in County Hall (100+ attendees) and got endorsement from those present to pursue the setting up of a Greater Manchester Coalition.

The next 12 months were spent preparing a successful bid for 3 years Urban Programme funding via GMC and holding regular Open Meetings on topics requested at the conference.

The launch of GMCDP was held a year later 1984/5.

Ken Lumb was elected as first Chair.