I met Bill in 1976 on my first visit to the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee in New York, during an interview by the group's director, Edith Tiger, for a job as Alger Hiss's researcher (the committee was representing him in his efforts to obtain FBI documents under the recently passed Freedom of Information Act). After a few minutes of conversation, she called Bill into the office and told him that I had been studying the Hiss case and wanted to help out. "What do you know about the case?" Bill thundered at me. "I've been working on it for more than twenty years."

Looking at him as he sat there, overweight, with a bulbous red nose, thinning hair, , a white shirt dotted with the remains of a meal from a week before, and a voice that could loosen a jammed window, I was actually a bit afraid. Edith gently explained to him that I was just a college student and wanted to volunteer my services.

"Are you independently wealthy?" Bill wanted to know, his voice softening. I later learned that Bill, like Whittaker Chambers in the 1930s, was always scrounging for money, and he probably figured me for a potential mark.

Over the next couple of months, Edith and others filled in the blanks of Bill's story for me, mostly after I would express exasperation at his rudeness. It turned out that Bill had come from a very wealthy Cleveland family. His father made a fortune in the fight film business, enough money, in fact, that the family moved to a house on an island off Miami Beach. On the next small island over was the Capone family, and indeed Bill and Al's little boy, Sonny, became good friends. Bill served in the infantry during World War II and was wounded twice (on the front lines socks not even within hailing distance of the bottom of his pants by the Germans — given Bill's prickly history such things need clarification) in Belgium. While recovering from his wounds, Bill met and later married a renowned violin prodigy, Miriam Soloviev ("Bill was very handsome when he was younger," Edith would tell me.) After the war, Miriam accompanied the singer Paul Robeson on a tour of Europe and Bill was able to join them on the trip. When he returned home, he resumed a career as a freelance writer and publicist. One of his jobs was doing publicity for the ACLU. When The Guardian, an independent radical weekly was founded in 1948, Bill became its top investigative reporter.

Though he was a slow writer, Bill's tenacity as a reporter was remarkable. That became apparent almost immediately when he was assigned to cover the trial of the Trenton Six, which was sometimes called "The North's Scottsboro Case." It involved six young black men who were on trial for allegedly killing a Trenton, New Jersey tailor. Although the Six had confessed to the crime, it was Bill's contention that their statements had been coerced. On the basis of their confessions, however, the Six were sentenced to die in the electric chair. Prompted by Bill's series on the case, a judge ordered a retrial. Eventually all of the defendants were freed. The subject of coerced confessions would occupy Bill for the rest of his life, first with the Trenton Six, then Klaus Fuchs, Harry Gold and David Greenglass in the and later with Whittaker Chambers in the Hiss case.

In 1951, wrote the questioning the Rosenbergs' guilty convictions. Those articles, which also appeared in *The Guardian*, eventually led to the worldwide movement to free the couple. The effort came to naught, of course, but on the left Bill came to be regarded as a hero for his efforts.

That same year Bill began looking into the Hiss case. It began with a phone from *The Guardian*'s co-editor, James Aronson, informing Bill that Hiss, who was then serving a five-year sentence at Lewisburg Prison in Pennsylvania, had just filed a motion for a new trial, based on evidence that had been turned up by his lawyers after his conviction. Aronson asked Bill to look into it to see whether it was worth an article.

Unlike the Rosenberg case or the Smith Act trials, Alger Hiss was not a cause célèbre for the left in the early 1950s. Hiss separated himself from the others when he chose not to plead the Fifth Amendment or the First before HUAC. He had also been a moderate New Deal official and a supporter of the Marshall Plan (which the Soviet Union bitterly opposed) with little sympathy for the left's more progressive agenda. Until Aronson's call, Bill, who himself had briefly been a member of the Communist Party, had taken only a cursory interest in the case. After speaking with Aronson, he took the subway downtown to the federal courthouse in New York. In the clerk's office, he sat down and read through the petition. What he read surprised him. Hiss's new attorney, Chester T. Lane, had amassed a powerful argument that the major evidence against Hiss had been forged.

Bill's first book on the case focused on Richard Nixon's role in the affair. The slim volume appeared in 1955 and was entitled "The Honorable Mr. Nixon." That led to a collaboration with a Beverly Hill tax attorney named George Altman to "once and for all solve the Hiss Case." Bill and Altman joined forces on the project through the early 1960s. Then Altman bowed out of the project, although a lot of their research would be incorporated into Bill's future work. Eventually, Bill turned toward writing a biography of Whittaker Chambers. He signed several contracts to publish the biography, but they fell through and he moved on to attempt a book encompassing the entire case. Alas, neither one was completed before his death in 2004.

Bill had long since ended his association with *The Guardian* when I first walked into the NECLC office in 1976, but he was still doing his research. A quarter century of that research combined with a gift for retaining facts, made Bill a walking, talking version of Google, fifteen years before the World Wide Web. Bill had seemingly memorized all the testimony and every last bit of evidence that had even the remotest connection to the case. You could ask him any question about it, and he'd have the answer, albeit a sarcastic one that was usually accompanied by a negative critique of your cerebral cortex.

By then, Bill was forced to make a living any which-way he could in order to continue his research. He drove a cab, sold gems over the telephone and played the horses. Bill claimed to have come out ahead on the ponies. It turned out that his secret was betting the favorite to show.

Bill had other ways of scrounging. He filed the occasional libel suit and signed a few book contracts. He also received a monthly stipend from the government on account of his war wounds, which still occasionally hobbled him. Bill's problems stemmed from a combination of bad luck and his own stubbornness. Donkeys could have taken obstinacy lessons from Bill. Here are just two examples: In 1968 when Bill was 53, the last addition to Rockefeller Center was about to be completed, but work was halted when two tenants in a building on West 48th Street refused to vacate their rent-controlled apartments. Bill was one of them. He had rejected the developer's original offer and a standoff ensued. It went on for months before the developer capitulated and paid Bill some $50,0000 to leave.

Thirty-five years later it happened again. This time, Bill was living on the fifth floor of a walk up on East 63rd Street. The entire row of buildings had been sold to make way for a high rise. After a while, all of the tenants moved out except for Bill, who was then over 80 years old. By the winter of 2002, the building he occupied was a mere shell with a stairway leading to his apartment and the remaining interior walls gone. One could stand on the stairs and look across what was formerly three other buildings. Bill was not especially steady on his feet, and one wrong step as he lumbered up the stairs with his cane, and he'd have found himself in what had formerly been his basement. Outside his apartment, his windows were covered with a tarp, as the landlord increased the pressure on him to move. If the heat didn't cause you to faint, the dust flying around from the construction nearly did the job. Then in the winter, the pipes froze because the heat was often off, necessitating visitors to haul jugs of water up the stairs to pour into the toilet tank. But the landlord didn't know who he was dealing with. "I've been in worse conditions in Europe," Bill would bellow as wafted from his mouth.

Eventually the landlord did cave. Bill not only enjoyed for the rest of his life the fruits of a large cash settlement, but also a large bright rent-free apartment just off Fifth Avenue to finish his book. He was there for three years, working every day.

I spent many hours at the new place, helping him organize his files and thoughts, and also teaching him how to use his new computer (for Bill the best thing about going online was that he could place his bets on the computer instead of having to go to down the stairs to an OTB parlor). As he got older and required more help, he became mellower. Occasionally, he would look at me cross-eyed, but I don't think he bellowed at me once in all the time he was in his new digs. In fact, he was always genuinely grateful for my company and sorry when I had to leave. He had lost none of his fire regarding the Hiss case, but as he got older and found that he needed to call on people for help, he became a much more likable person. He turned out to be great company and a terrific storyteller. We spent many hours combing through his past for what he planned to be the last chapter of his book, a personal one that would explain how he became convinced of Hiss's innocence. At 87, his memory had lost little of its sharpness, but he was overweight and diabetic and had already survived one bout with cancer. I worried about him constantly. Then one evening in the spring of 2004, after not having spoken to him for a while, I called to see how he was doing. "I'm disintegrating," he said evenly.

He was, literally. Cancer had permeated body. That night he went into the hospital and never came home. He died a few weeks later on June 12, 2004. Bill didn't fear death, at least not openly. "No one gets out alive," Bill he would say with a shrug often enough his last few years. Still, he died hoping he might get enough medicine to go home and polish up a few more pages of his book.

After Bill died, his son Howard entrusted me with the job of finishing the book. I agreed to do it without ever having seen it. The first thing I needed to do was download it from his computer. I went back to his apartment for the first time a few days after his death. On Bill's desk were his final chapter notes, made evidently the day he left for the hospital. The latest edited version of the manuscript had been printed out and was sitting on a chair. I turned on his computer and smiled when I saw his bookmark for the New York Racing Board. Ever the tinkerer, his hard drive had several versions of the book. I downloaded those and rifled through his file cabinets and boxes where I found several more versions of the same manuscript (along with a few overdue bill from the 1960s). Bill had about seven file cabinets worth of interview notes, clippings, correspondence, book manuscripts and government documents (some of which were "borrowed" from NECLC). I had his cabinets shipped to my home. It took months to sort through the files, which were in indescribably horrible condition. Folders coated in dust held pages that stuck together by encrusted food. I learned to open file folders over a garbage can, so desiccated insects wouldn't drop into my lap.

But the files turned out to be a goldmine and not just from an entomological point of view. Over more than 50 years of research, Bill appeared to have corresponded with or interviewed at one time or another every major and minor principal connected with the case, and he kept everything. Though their collaboration ultimately wasn't successful, his correspondence with George Altman represented some of the best thinking I had read on the case. And while he didn't record any of his interviews, Bill turned out to be a thorough note taker.

The New York Times report about his 1968 holdout quoted Bill to the effect that he was staying in the apartment to finish his book on the Hiss case. That book never was published. Bill's notes explained why. He went through three editors, all of whom left the company and in one case publishing (whether these problems had to do with the frustrations of dealing with Bill were not clear). A subsequent deal was put on the back burner after the Freedom of Information Act documents first arrived and Bill felt he needed to absorb the new material. Later, his publisher was killed in an automobile accident. In the 1990s, his long suffering agent, Peter Shepherd, negotiated one final deal, but Bill complained that the advance was too low and turned it down. That didn't stop his work on the book. With the help of freelance editor, Zach Sklar, he completed his manuscript with the exception of the final personal chapter.

I had read two of the book's chapters a few years before, but as I sat down for the first time with the entire manuscript, I had no idea what I was going to find. I recalled Joseph Mitchell's story of Professor Seagull, the Greenwich Village character who for decades told everyone he met that he was compiling an oral history of civilization. After his death, Mitchell opened his notebooks and found page after page of gibberish — not surprising considering that everyone but Mitchell knew Professor Seagull was crazy as a loon.

As I delved into Bill's manuscript, however, my worries ceased. It turned out that Bill wasn't a lazy writer, he was a careful one, and his stubbornness served him well. Unlike the mad professors, Bill's pages were filled with remarkable reporting and cogent argument, the product of a master reporter who had, amazingly, spent a lifetime getting the story right.