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A city's very wholeness in bringing together people with communities of interest is one of its greatest assets, possibly the greatest.

-Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities

On June 6th, San Francisco lost one its great community leaders, Patricia Walkup. Patricia worked tirelessly and selflessly for a better San Francisco. She was best known for her work to bring down the Central Freeway and replace it with the Octavia Boulevard, an initiative she helped sheppard through three separate ballot measures over the course of over three years.

Patricia's "doggedness" was noted by everyone who had the pleasure of working with her. After Prop H, an initiative to rebuild the Central Freeway, passed in 1997, most of the community activists who had worked to defeat the measure were exhausted and emotionally depleted. Although some were willing to give up the fight, Patricia was not among them. Within weeks she was organizing to put another measure on the ballot to repeal Prop H and instead tear down the freeway and replace it with Octavia Boulevard. Robin Levitt, a fellow community activist, neighbor, and friend in the Hayes Valley neighborhood, recalled how "We had to collect 18,000 signatures to get Prop E on the ballot. And Patricia would just get on the phone and call volunteers. She got all these volunteers do go out and get signatures. She would sit in her vestibule for 10 hours a day for weeks while we were collecting signatures. **People would bring the petitions back to her and she would count every one and organize them - checking them** to make sure the information was complete. I'll never forget that." Tom Radulovich, Executive Director of Livable Cities said, "She was really the heart and soul of the whole operation (to pass Prop E). The kind of Patricia "doggedness" was something that we all commented on."

Patricia started her career in public service by volunteering at Cadillac Hotel, a low-income SRO hotel in the Tenderloin, in the late 1980s. Kathy Looper who, along with her husband Leroy, helped run Cadillac Hotel, remembers her first impression of Patricia as a woman with a flair for fashion and a sense of playfulness. "(Patricia) had these beautiful red glasses and beautiful red lipstick and a vintage dress and I thought, 'here is a woman after my own heart,'" Looper recalled. Soon Patricia was walking from her apartment in Noe Valley to the Tenderloin three days a week to support efforts at Cadillac Hotel, working with residents and eventually helping to organize "crime abatement" meetings of over 150 community members seeking to improve conditions in the Tenderloin. It was through her work in the Tenderloin that Patricia first learned to appreciate the impact that one person can have on her community. "Patricia helped people on a one-to-one basis and thought 'I can help do this on a larger basis,'" remarked Looper.

Patricia had the opportunity to help people on a larger basis after moving to the Hayes Valley neighborhood in the early 1990s. At the time, the neighborhood was riddled with crime. Prostitution and drug activity flourished under the freeway. Not one to accept the situation as it was, Patricia organized her neighbors to help make the neighborhood safer.

She also was quite tenacious in her efforts to ensure the involvement of the San Francisco Police. Looper remembers how Patricia would patrol the neighborhood, including the area under the freeway, “(Patricia) would get out in her car in the middle of the night...and when she saw (a prostitute) she would call the police. And if they didn’t come fast enough, she would just wait.” During her waits, Patricia would talk to the prostitutes, eventually partnering with Norma Hotaling of Standing Against Global Exploitation Project (SAGE), to raise awareness about the issues surrounding prostitution.

Patricia’s concerns about safety in her neighborhood were what lead her to get involved in the freeway revolts of the 1990s and her “doggedness” was what enabled her to ultimately prevail. Up until the final weeks of her illness, Patricia remained very active in her neighborhood through the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association (HVNA). She worked to ensure that the redevelopment of the Hayes Valley public housing projects was successful, helped push the Market/Octavia Better Neighborhoods plan forward towards what she hoped would be its eventual adoption, and advocated that the plan for the reuse of the UC Laguna Extension site include the best possible package of public benefits for the neighborhood.

Jason Henderson, who sat with Patricia on the HVNA board, commented that, “Patricia positioned this neighborhood (Hayes Valley) as the anti-NIMBY neighborhood. She thought that density, as long as it is graceful, is good. She was very proud of that.” Tom Radulovich agrees. “Some neighborhood activists work to keep all the poor people out (of their neighborhood), or they don’t want any renters...Patricia was the opposite of this. She got what making a good neighborhood was all about.”

Above all else, Patricia showed San Franciscans that tenacity, combined with graciousness and a capacity to listen, enabled, as she put it, “ordinary citizens to accomplish extraordinary things”. Perhaps Robin Levitt said it best when asked to share his thoughts on Patricia’s legacy - “You could never say no to Patricia. And the thing was, she was always right.”