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JANE JACOBS, 1916-2006

## The places that mattered to Jane Jacobs

**In remembering the city's favourite adopted urbanologist, who passed away on Tuesday, DEIRDRE KELLY asks her friends and fellow fighters about the places she held dearest to her heart. Photographs by SIMON HAYTER**

DEIRDRE KELLY

### Kensington Market

When Ms. Jacobs and her family first moved to the city from New York in 1968, it was the market's humming chaos -- live chickens in cages, a multitude of languages, and thick knots of pedestrian traffic -- that made for love at first sight. Before renting their first apartment on Spadina Road, the family looked for flats along Baldwin Street. When they began house hunting, they revisited the neighbourhood before settling into the Annex. "There was no question that it felt like home to us," Jim Jacobs, her son, remembers of Kensington. "It was the variety, and all the things going on in the street and all the different people. It was the most intense mixture."

### 69 Albany Ave.

A former rooming house renovated by her late architect husband, Bob Jacobs, Ms. Jacobs's home of 37 years had a telephone booth preserved from the building's previous incarnation, and, at least during the visit of one guest a decade ago, white plastic patio chairs in the living room. Conversations with guests would often be interrupted by phone calls. After closing the door for privacy, Toronto city councillor Nadine Nowlan remembers, "she would emerge declaring, 'Oh that was so-and-so from New York, or that was so-and-so from Brazil.'" Once a year, Ms. Jacobs feted the past and present recipients of the Jane Jacobs Prize -- founded in 1997 to honour citizens that have contributed to the city's vitality -- at a legendary potluck dinner in her home. Rollo Myers, who won the 2000 prize, says the get-togethers were gruelling. "There'd be a swarm of ideas, and you'd have to be on your toes and be prepared to defend your point of view. After the first one I was shell-shocked, and [her friend] Mary Rowe said, cheerfully, 'You got off light.'"

### Spadina Road

The site of her first public Toronto victory -- against the proposal to extend the Spadina Expressway (now Allen Road) through the centre of the city. The 1971 achievement was the cumulative effort of Annex residents, but Ms. Jacobs, a newcomer fresh from a neighbourhood urban-renewal fight in New York, inspired and galvanized the Stop Spadina Save Our City group. She never lost her distaste for expressways that divided a city. "She always hated the Gardiner," recalls Councillor Nowlan, a group member. "She just hated elevated expressways. They were ugly, and they were a barrier to people enjoying the waterfront, and they funnel cars into the central part of the city and create bottlenecks. She never tired of complaining about them."

### The suburbs

In 2001, when her doctor prescribed regular walks for exercise, Ms. Jacobs began heading outside

the city core for "discovery" strolls. Some of what she discovered -- monolithic subdivisions with no pedestrian life -- dismayed her. Elsewhere, such as in Brampton and Mississauga, she saw potential. But she never referred to them as the burbs, says journalist Sid Adilman, a long-time neighbour who accompanied her on her walks -- "she always named them, because they weren't faceless to her." On one trip, she paid a visit to Mississauga's town hall to pore over urban-development plans -- amid the buzz of an excited planning-department staff. "I thought Mississauga was a hellhole," says Mr. Adilman. "But she didn't. She actually liked what she saw. She liked their plan to expand and improve the downtown core. She was more the optimist."

### **401 Richmond St. W.**

It's no surprise that Ms. Jacobs enjoyed visiting the converted warehouse near the corner of Spadina. With its mix of tenants -- galleries, studios, a café, a daycare -- "it embodies all of her ideas about mixed uses and of people interacting with each other to be creative and innovative under one roof," says former mayor John Sewell. Community-friendly property developer Margie Zeidler, who completed the building's conversion in 1994, chalks up its inspiration, in part, to a chapter of Ms. Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. "She wrote, 'Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings.' When I read that, at age 18, it was such a flash. I thought, 'Yes! Warehouses -- they have a purpose.'"

### **The Toronto Islands**

Ms. Jacobs's fondness for the islands was demonstrable: When the city proposed demolishing the houses on Ward's and Algonquin islands to increase parkland -- as it had done to Centre Island and Hanlan's Point -- Ms. Jacobs was invited to attend a Canada Day rally in support of the community. Writer and archivist Sally Gibson remembers Ms. Jacobs's call-to-arms that day in 1980: "She said, 'This community shouldn't be destroyed, because it's loveable. It's unique. It's a lovely thing. It's wicked to destroy loveable, unique and lovely things. When people defend a place the way you islanders are defending this, that's the greatest argument of all. It says it's worth saving.'"

### **Dundas and Sherbourne**

It's a pivotal moment that many remember well: a morning in 1973, at a protest to preserve the neighbourhood at Dundas and Sherbourne -- part of a planned razing of Sherbourne Street's east side. As the bulldozers reared into action, Ms. Jacobs called on picketers to rip down the hoardings, without which, according to a city bylaw, the developers could not proceed. The tear-down was averted. The standoff led to high-density infill housing in the laneways behind the historic homes -- downtown's first non-profit housing project. "It was a brilliant example of her being active within the rest of the community, and of her ingenuity," says Mr. Sewell, an alderman at the time. The partially demolished porch still stands at 241 Sherbourne.

### **The island airport**

First, there was the Harbour City project, a plan to turn the site of the island airport into a 60,000-strong residential development. She was integral, architect Ed Zeidler remembers, to his vision of houses, retail, hotels, recreational spaces in a mostly car-free environment. She was particularly adamant that it be not just for the wealthy. The plan was scuttled in 1974, but her interest in the development of the island never abated. In opposing the expansion of the airport in 2003, she threw her support behind then-long-shot mayoral candidate David Miller. "Jane felt very passionately that

to build a bridge and expand the airport was inimical to building a great neighbourhood," says Mayor Miller. "She understood that there could be great neighbourhoods on the waterfront if only they weren't under the flight path of a busy Toronto airport."

### **Royal St. George's College**

Ms. Jacobs's last battle was, fittingly, in her own backyard: the proposed three-storey addition to a boys' private school less than a block from her house. "She didn't want the expansion to stop -- she wanted the school to move altogether," says Lynn Spink of the Neighbours of St. Alban's Park group that has spearheaded the fight. "And on that point she was a lot more radical than the other neighbours." City council and community council voted to halt the expansion in November, but the school appealed the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board. On Wednesday, her son attended the hearing to speak on her behalf. "She wasn't the retiring type," Jim Jacobs says. "I think that it's inevitable that she died fighting."

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*Former mayor John Sewell, recalling how Jacobs's quick thinking averted the demolition of the corner of Dundas and Sherbourne. A partially demolished porch at 241 Sherbourne still stands.*

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*Community developer Margie Zeidler on Jacobs's influence on 401 Richmond. Her favourite spot: the rooftop garden.*

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*Stop Spadina Save Our City co-organizer Nadine Nowlan, on Jacobs's continued distaste for expressways. The proposed Spadina Expressway extension would have run through the Annex neighbourhood they shared.*

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*Rollo Myers of Architectural Conservancy Ontario, on the get-togethers at Ms. Jacobs's Albany*

*Avenue home. Every year, she hosted past and present recipients of the Jane Jacobs Award for a potluck dinner.*

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