

Patricia Rainier (1925–2011)



Pat Rainier with (from left) Town Clerk Keith Nicol, Nelson Mandela and Deputy Mayor Rob Haswell on the City Hall balcony when Nelson Mandela paid a courtesy call in 1990.

PAT RAINIER, who was born in Kimberley, raised in Pretoria and who died in that city in March 2011, had a long and distinguished career as a Pietermaritzburg city councillor between 1975 and 1993. She had moved to Pietermaritzburg when her late husband, Hedley, was appointed Master of the Supreme Court.

First elected to the 15-person, but overwhelmingly male, council in 1975, she soon established herself as a firm and empathetic chairperson of the Staff Committee. In that position, she gained valuable insight into the workings of every department, and that was to stand her in good stead in the challenging years ahead.

Pat was re-elected unopposed until 1984, when a young upstart (the present

writer!) unseated her by a mere 68 votes, but Pat and her husband Hedley were such good losers that we became friends. During that election I became aware of her standing in our community, and more particularly in the bowls fraternity, and not surprisingly Pat was re-elected to council in 1988. That election produced the first overtly party political council in our city, but Pat remained independent and stated: “I do not have the support of a political party unless you call my husband a political party – he is my sole support in the campaign”.

Her experience and independence saw her elected as mayor in September 1990, and I was pleased to serve alongside her as the deputy mayor. At her installation, Rainier expressed concern

Obituaries

that the then all-white council was not talking to the city's black community. She said that local government had to change if it was going to be of any use to the country at all.

Her mettle was soon put to the test in October 1990 when, as is customary when a politician visits a city, a courtesy call must be made to the Mayor. In this case the visitor was Nelson Mandela, and to her credit Pat did not decline or pass the buck to her deputy. Although understandably nervous, she graciously received our future president, for tea and scones, on a memorable Sunday morning.

The rest of her year as Mayor was turbulent, as protests, rent boycotts in Happy Valley, and the advent of informal settlements challenged the *status quo*. Pat, however, remained resolute but fair in often hostile situations. Many a mayor struggled to revert to being an ordinary councillor after relinquishing high office, but Pat soldiered on, and during the waning years of the last all-white council, she could be relied upon to be both pragmatic, and even humanely progressive, while most of her

colleagues clung to the past. Therefore in 1992 I proposed in a private motion that her long and meritorious service be recognised, and she was duly and deservedly "elected and appointed to the dignity of Alderman".

Ranier was an ardent bowler and president of SA Women's Bowls from 1985 to 1988, serving on the national selection committee with distinction. For her services she was made a life member of Bowls SA. She was also a past president of the Natal Inland Bowling Association.

Ranier was an ardent Roman Catholic, but worked with all religious institutions and appealed to them to join in prayers for peace.

Her passing all but closes a chapter in our city's municipal history, in which Pat Rainier, and the majority of councillors, devoted themselves, over many years, to representing those who elected them, and to championing our city – not for financial reward, but out of a sense of civic duty and pride.

She leaves three children, 10 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

ROBERT HASWELL