

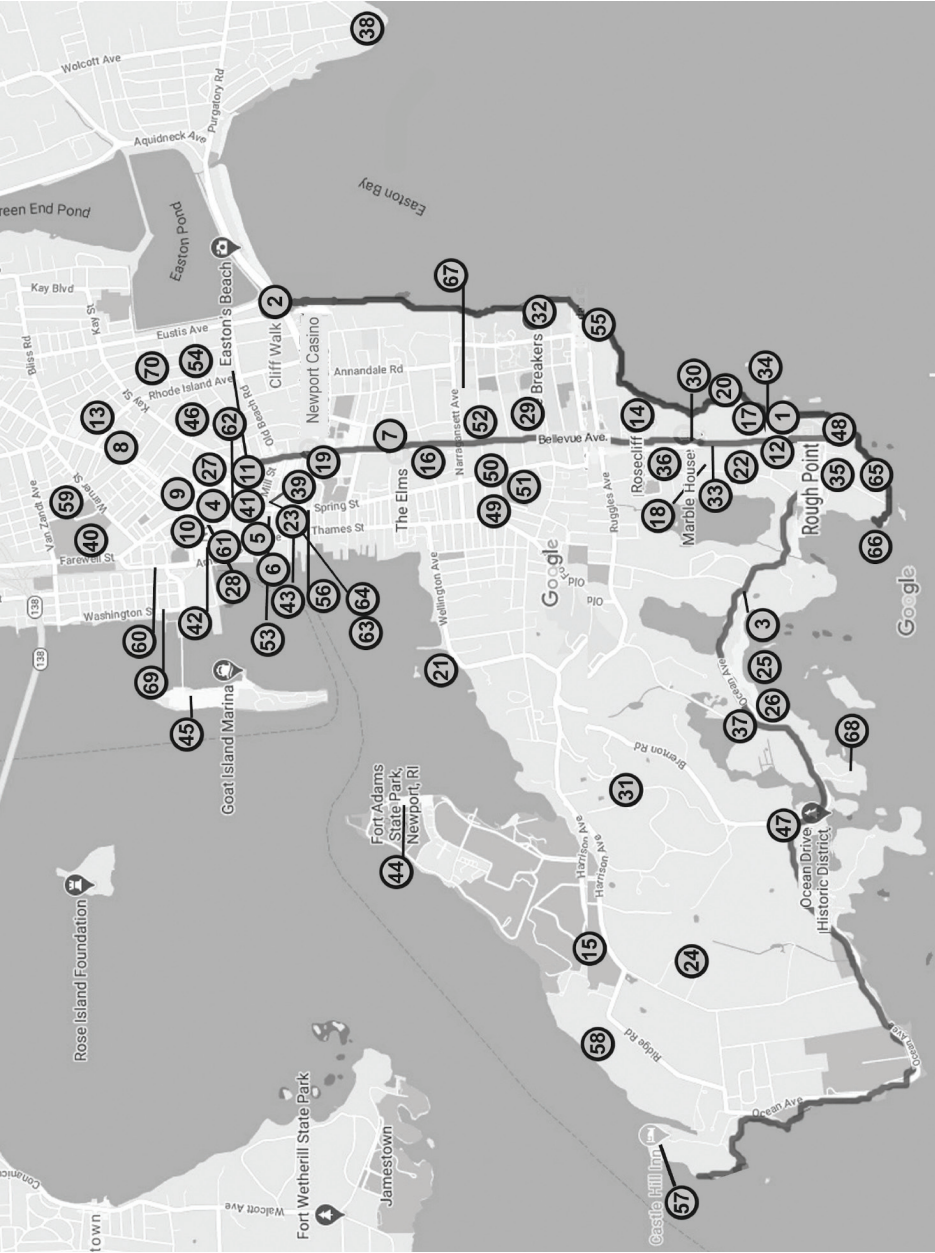
# **HOMICIDE AT ROUGH POINT**

**Peter Lance**



TENACITY MEDIA BOOKS

Mario Puzo famously began *The Godfather* with Balzac's observation that "Behind every great fortune there is a crime." Few concentrations of American wealth are associated with as many crimes as the tobacco, aluminum and energy fortune inherited by Doris Duke. This is the full, unexpurgated story of one of them.



## Newport Map: Locations cited in Homicide At Rough Point.

- 1      **Rough Point:** 680 Bellevue Avenue
- 2      **Cliff Walk:** Memorial Boulevard to Ledge Road
- 3      **Ocean Drive:** Ocean Avenue to Castle Hill
- 4      **Touro Synagogue:** 85 Touro Street
- 5      **Newport Daily News:** 140 Thames Street (1967-1968)
- 6      **The Black Pearl:** 10 ½ Bannister's Wharf
- 7      **De La Salle Academy:** 364 Bellevue Avenue
- 8      **Cranston-Calvert School:** 15 Cranston Avenue
- 9      **The Quality Lunch:** 25 Broadway
- 10     **Newport Police Headquarters (1967-68)**
- 11     **Newport Reading Room:** 29 Bellevue Avenue
- 12     **Quatrel/Lorillard Estate:** 673 Bellevue Avenue
- 13     **Newport Hospital:** 20 Powell Avenue
- 14     **Rosecliff:** 548 Bellevue Avenue
- 15     **Hammersmith Farm:** 225 Harrison Avenue
- 16     **The Elms/Berwind Estate:** 367 Bellevue Avenue
- 17     **Miramar/Rice Estate:** 646 Bellevue Avenue
- 18     **The Holmwoods:** 161 Coggeshall Avenue
- 19     **Newport Casino:** 190 Bellevue Avenue
- 20     **Clarendon Court:** 626 Bellevue Avenue
- 21     **Ida Lewis Yacht Club:** 170 Wellington Avenue
- 22     **Belcourt/Tinney Estate:** 657 Bellevue Avenue
- 23     **Touro Park:** Bellevue Avenue & Mill Street
- 24     **Newport Country Club:** 280 Harrison Avenue
- 25     **Baileys Beach:** 34 Ocean Avenue
- 26     **The Ledges/Cushing Estate:** 66 Ocean Avenue
- 27     **Tubley's Spa:** 58 Spring Street (1967)
- 28     **Superior Courthouse:** 45 Washington Square
- 29     **Chateau-Sur-Mer:** 474 Bellevue Avenue
- 30     **Marble House:** 596 Bellevue Avenue
- 31     **Beacon Hill/Swiss Village:** 152 Harrison Avenue
- 32     **The Breakers:** 44 Ochre Point Avenue
- 33     **Beaulieu:** 615 Bellevue Avenue

- 34      **Rock Cliff:** 670 Bellevue Avenue
- 35      **The Mailands:** 37 Ledge Road
- 36      **Sherwood:** 533 Bellevue Avenue
- 37      **Idle Hour:** Ocean Avenue & Hazard Road
- 38      **The Clambake Club:** 353 Tuckerman Avenue
- 39      **The Newport Tower:** 152 Mill Street
- 40      **Newport's Back Yard:** 93 Kingston Avenue
- 41      **The Hotel Viking:** 1 Bellevue Avenue
- 42      **Fire Department Headquarters:** 21 West Marlborough
- 43      **The Blue Cat:** 38 ½ Franklin Street
- 44      **Fort Adams:** 90 Fort Adams Drive
- 45      **The Torpedo Station:** Goat Island (1939-51)
- 46      **Daniel Swinburne:** 6 Greenough Place
- 47      **The Playhouse:** 294 Ocean Avenue
- 48      **Seaverge:** 4 Ledge Road
- 49      **The Hedges / van Rensselaer Estate:** 453 Bellevue Avenue
- 50      **Timmy & Julia Sullivan's House**
- 51      **Brown Villa/Slocum Estate:** 459 Bellevue Avenue
- 52      **St. Catherine Academy:** 424 Bellevue Avenue
- 53      **Pelham Garage:** 17 Pelham Street
- 54      **Whitehall/Coogan Estate:** Catherine Street
- 55      **Fairholme/Young Estate:** 237 Ruggles Avenue
- 56      **St. Mary's Church:** 12 William Street
- 57      **Castle Hill Inn:** 590 Ocean Avenue
- 58      **Annandale Farm:** 25 Ridge Road
- 59      **Daniel Lyman House:** 28 Kingston Avenue
- 60      **Daniel Lyman House:** 11 Third Street
- 61      **YMCA:** 41 Mary Street
- 62      **Trinity Church:** 1 Queen Anne Square
- 63      **Rev. Lockett F. Ballard:** 44 Pelham Street
- 64      **Dr. McAllister's office:** 92 Pelham Street
- 65      **Plaisance/Beck Estate:** 41 Ledge Road
- 66      **Pelican Lodge/Pell Residence:** 61 Ledge Road
- 67      **Bois Doré:** 115 Narragansett Avenue
- 68      **Seafair:** 254 Ocean Avenue
- 69      **Hunter House:** 54 Washington Street
- 70      **Eastbourne Lodge:** 78 Rhode Island Avenue

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# INTRODUCTION

Cielo Drive cuts like a beautiful scar along the bottom of a V-shaped canyon in the hills of Bel Air, off of Benedict. In the winter, when the rains come, it's lush and green and that's the way Sharon Tate saw it from 10050 Cielo, the red farmhouse she'd rented with her husband Roman Polanski. As she unpacked the moving boxes on Valentine's Day in 1969, she had no way of knowing that she only had another six months to live.

On the night of August 9<sup>th</sup>, four hyper-violent members of "The Manson Family" would invade that red house and murder Sharon, along with three of her closest friends. But strangely, half a year earlier, Sharon had a short brush with a *different* killer.

It happened in late February after her younger sister Patti, looked across the canyon at the ominous Spanish-Moorish estate Sharon called "The Haunted House." In their remarkable memoir, *Restless Souls*,<sup>1</sup> Alisa Statmen and Brie Tate wrote that Patti, then eleven years old and curious for a look at the place, hiked down the cul-de-sac and across Cielo Drive. She walked up Bella Drive to number 1436. There she encountered an open gate where two white pillars topped with carriage lamps bore the name of the estate: Falcon Lair.



In 1925 it had been purchased by Rodolfo Alonso Raffaello Pierre Filbert Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguolla, otherwise known as Rudolf Valentino.<sup>2</sup> Worshiped by silent film fans as “the great lover,” Rudy, as friends knew him, once observed that, “I am merely the canvas on which women paint their dreams.” Still, at that time he was Hollywood’s reigning king and the 16-room villa that sprawled across eight acres equipped with stables, kennels and servants’ quarters, sat atop the hill like a white stucco castle.

In 1953, that estate was bought by Doris Duke, the fabulously wealthy heiress to a fortune amassed by her father from the profits of American Tobacco Company, Alcoa Aluminum, and Duke Power. She was the reigning female scion of the family that endowed Duke University.

## TEA & COOKIES

The big black wrought iron gates were open when young Patti wandered inside that day. Suddenly, she heard the caretaker yell out in a loud British accent, “This is private property. What are you *doing* here?” Startled, Patti turned and lost her balance in the gravel driveway, falling and skinning her knee. Just then, as if on cue, a black limousine pulled in. A tinted window rolled down and a tall woman in black lowered her sunglasses and asked who she was.

Once Patti identified herself as the sister of “Sharon,” who lived “across the way in the red barn,” Doris Duke knew that this wasn’t just *any* eleven year old. She was the sister of the hottest young star in Hollywood who was married to one of the hottest young directors. So, in her imperial style, Doris snapped to the caretaker, “Stop being such an *ogre* and bring Patti in so we can clean those scrapes. And get me the Polanskis’ phone number.”

Later, as Patti recounted in the book, the Duke staff had bandaged her knee and served her tea and cookies when Sharon walked in, “nervously chewing her lower lip” and apologizing to the blond billionaire who, at that moment, was the third richest woman in the world behind Queen Elizabeth II & Queen Juliana of The Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> But Sharon Tate, whose motion picture career was taking off like an Atlas rocket,

was royalty herself. Her husband Roman, just coming off the hit film *Rosemary's Baby*, was a kind of cinematic Polish prince. So why was she nervous? What would make her bite her lip in the face of a woman whose caretaker's aggressive warning had caused her little sister to draw blood?

Because Sharon was killed so mercilessly that summer, we'll never know. But one thing is sure. That wasn't the *first* time Sharon Tate had been drawn into Doris Duke's orbit. Nearly two and a half years earlier, one of Sharon's closest friends, designer Eduardo Tirella, had been violently killed after Miss Duke crushed him under a two-ton station wagon and many of his friends suspected that it was murder.

There have been dozens of books chronicling what infamously became known as the "Tate-LaBianca murders;"<sup>4</sup> from Vincent Bugliosi's groundbreaking *Helter Skelter* to Ed Sanders' terrifying Manson bio, *The Family*. The brutal stabbing of Sharon Tate, then eight and a half months pregnant with her son Paul, is a tragic cautionary tale of a young woman of great promise cut down in the prime of life. But the same can be said for Eduardo, whose career as a Hollywood set designer was just beginning to catch fire, when he told the possessive, often violent heiress that he was leaving her, just minutes before she ran him down outside the gates of her Newport, Rhode Island estate. Because Doris Duke had the money and the power, she succeeded in effectively erasing his death from the narrative of her controversial life. For more than fifty years, the full truth behind what happened at Rough Point on the late afternoon of October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1966 has been hidden.

Until now.

# PREFACE

I grew up in Newport, Rhode Island, where I learned to write my first five-point lead. After college I went away and came back 50 years later to try and crack a homicide case. It had sat unsolved, like a stone in my shoe, ever since I'd left town. In the beginning, I thought that there were two principal characters in the story: the billionaire and her victim, but I soon came to realize that there was a third protagonist: Newport itself.

Two legendary men of American letters, the social critic Cleveland Amory and the novelist/playwright Thornton Wilder, who twice won the Pulitzer Prize, each saw the former Rhode Island colonial capital as a series of cities. In his 1953 study of the country's great playgrounds for the rich, *The Last Resorts*,<sup>5</sup> Amory described "three separate Newports." But Wilder was far more discerning. Twenty years later, in his novel *Theophilus North* he understood Newport in the context of German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who had discovered ancient Troy as "nine cities, one on top of the other."<sup>6</sup>

That took me back to my first trip to Rome where one can find evidence of multiple eras within a few city blocks. From the balcony above the Piazza Venezia, where Il Duce delivered his frightening Fascist rants in the 1930's, to the Forum Boarium, site of the first gladiatorial combat in 264 BC, and not far away, The Palantine Hill where mythol-

ogy tells us that Romulus and Remus were birthed from a she-wolf 500 years before that. All I had to do was “roll focus” and I could time travel without changing hotels.

So it was and still is with Newport, a city of layers where the history of the American experiment in liberty has been manifested in all of its glory, heroism, ambition, accomplishment, treachery and grace.

This is a story about a brilliant life cut short too soon by one of the luckiest beneficiaries of unbridled capitalism who ever lived. But it’s also a tale of generations of every class and color who endeavored -- and for the most part succeeded -- in making that experiment work. I loved this town as a kid and going back now, as I sought to examine it in hindsight, I love it even more.

So let’s take a walk from the Newport waterfront, up Historic Hill past the old Stone Tower and down Bellevue Avenue to the Ocean Drive and let’s see how many layers we can find as we unravel the homicide at Rough Point.

Peter Lance  
Newport, Rhode Island  
February, 2021

## CHAPTER ONE

# MURDER AT THE GATES

On the last full day of his life -- October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1966 -- Eduardo Tirella flew into Newport, RI, the storied summer colony of The New York 400.<sup>7</sup> Doris Duke, the wealthiest woman in America<sup>8</sup> picked him up at the airport and they drove to Rough Point, her English-manor estate on Bellevue Avenue, known to Newporters as “Millionaire’s Row.”<sup>9</sup> Tirella, whose close friends called him “Eddie,” was about to declare that he was leaving Doris<sup>10</sup> after seven years as her constant companion,<sup>11</sup> artistic curator and designer at her estates in New Jersey, Bel Air, Honolulu, and Newport. It was now time to let his patron know, face to face, that he was severing his professional ties with her, for good.

The handsome Tirella, a war hero and Renaissance man with movie star looks, had just finished the set design for *Don’t Make Waves*, a new film starring Tony Curtis and his close friend Sharon Tate.<sup>12</sup> With his Hollywood career amping up, he was anxious to get back to the West Coast, so he’d asked Doris to rent a station wagon.<sup>13</sup>

His plan was to load up his paintings and effects and drive to his mother's house in New Jersey, where he'd drop them off and fly home.<sup>14</sup> At 42 he was on the edge of an important new career. But nobody left Doris Duke without consequences. A notoriously jealous Scorpio, she was known for her violent temper.<sup>15</sup> A few years back, in a drunken rage, she'd stabbed her common-law husband with a butcher knife when *he'd* angered her,<sup>16</sup> and Eduardo, who was gay, had been warned by his partner and friends not to test her.<sup>17</sup> He assured them that he could handle Doris and agreed to come back to Newport for one last curating job.

Still, by late the next afternoon, October 7<sup>th</sup>, servants at Rough Point remember them getting into a heated argument.<sup>18</sup> Doris, then 53, had rented the Dodge Polara wagon from the local AVIS dealership and they were about to head out to pick up an artifact Eddie had deemed worthy.<sup>19</sup>

Moments later, as they exited the estate with Tirella behind the wheel, he got out to open the massive wrought iron gates. Suddenly, Duke slid into the driver's seat and seemed to snap.

She released the parking brake, shifted into drive and slammed down on the accelerator. The rear tires of the two-ton wagon spun, leaving gouges in the gravel driveway. From a dead stop the wagon roared forward, hit Tirella, burst through the gates and dragged him halfway across Bellevue before smashing through a fence and crashing into a tree.<sup>20</sup> As Doris sat stunned behind the wheel, Eduardo's body lay beneath.<sup>21</sup> With massive injuries to his lungs, spinal cord and brain, death was instantaneous.<sup>22</sup>

Ninety-six hours later, with no inquest – basing the brief probe of Tirella's homicide *entirely* on the word of Miss Duke – police chief Joseph A. Radice declared the death accidental.<sup>23</sup> Doris later signed a transcript of an interview prepared by the police<sup>24</sup> and the case was closed.<sup>25</sup> Seven months after that, Radice retired and later bought the first of two condominium units in Hollywood, Florida.<sup>26</sup> The Lieutenant Inspector who had first questioned her, leap-frogged over the Captain of Detectives to become chief.<sup>27</sup> Another cop at that interview was promoted to Sergeant.<sup>28</sup>

Eight days after the homicide, following years of haranguing with Newport after she blocked off Cliff Walk,<sup>29</sup> the pedestrian path surrounding her estate, Doris donated \$25,000 to restore it.<sup>30</sup> It was the

equivalent of \$200,000 today.<sup>31</sup> Next, she gave \$10,000 (\$80,000 in 2021 dollars) to Newport Hospital, where she'd been hidden away from authorities on the night of the crash while her lawyers traveled from New York to create a cover story.<sup>32</sup> In the months that followed, she began to set up The Newport Restoration Foundation which eventually renovated 70 original colonial buildings.<sup>33</sup> Her sudden burst of philanthropy led one cynical Newporter to muse, "The death of one man was well worth the long-term benefit to this City."<sup>34</sup>

Tirella's closest surviving niece sees it another way: "She killed him twice," said Donna Lohmeyer, 74, who's been searching for decades for the truth behind his death. "She destroyed his body and then she eviscerated his memory."<sup>35</sup> That came four and a half years later after Doris steadfastly refused to settle with Tirella's five sisters and three brothers who were willing to accept as little as \$200,000<sup>36</sup> at a time when she was making \$1 million a week in *interest* on her money.<sup>37</sup>

Instead, she forced them to file a wrongful death civil suit which led to a 10-day trial in the summer of 1971<sup>38</sup> in the same Providence Superior Courthouse where the second trial of Duke's Bellevue Avenue neighbor, Claus von Bulow, had taken place.<sup>39</sup> In that action the Tirella family was asking for \$1.25 million.<sup>40</sup> After all, Eddie was at the top of his game professionally. He had more than two decades of earning capacity ahead of him and the year before his death he'd made more than \$43,000<sup>41</sup> — the equivalent of \$355,000 today.<sup>42</sup>

At that trial Doris testified that she "always asked Eduardo's advice before buying or planning anything for her estates."<sup>43</sup> Over the past decade he'd counseled her on the purchase of art worth tens of millions -- pieces they'd acquired together on more than 100 occasions.<sup>44</sup> He traveled with her to London, Paris and Italy to scout paintings, tapestries and rare furniture and he'd transformed Duke Gardens, a series of abandoned greenhouses on her New Jersey estate, into a spectacular series of themed botanical displays considered one of the most significant glass-house collections in America.<sup>45</sup> Eddie had his own living quarters in each of Doris's five estates<sup>46</sup> so she clearly wanted to keep him close.

"But even more," said Pola Zanay, a longtime friend, "She hated the idea of *him* leaving her."<sup>47</sup>



Eduardo Tirella and Doris Duke. Mid 1960's

Doris Duke was actually found “negligent” in Tirella’s homicide,<sup>48</sup> but during the damage phase, her lawyer portrayed him as a spendthrift, ne’er-do-well and “financial fiasco.”<sup>49</sup> The shocking result: after legal fees and disbursements were deducted, each of his siblings was awarded a grand total of \$5,620.<sup>50</sup> “Considering what he had done for her and meant to her, it was shameful,” said Zanay who was also close to Eddie’s partner, sculptor Edmund Kara. “It was the worst kind of character assassination, considering the sort of nationally-known designer that he was.”<sup>51</sup>

As a gay man in the mid-Sixties Tirella had a diverse and complex resumé that ran deep. He’d been a performer at New Jersey nightclubs in the early 1940s, falling in with Frank Sinatra. His niece Donna told me that her mother “Remembered them coming home to eat Italian after some of Frank’s dates at the Meadowbrook, where the big bands played. But the war changed all that.”<sup>52</sup>

In 1943, Eduardo enlisted in the Army and shipped off to Europe, earning a Bronze Star for his service at the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>53</sup> In the early Fifties he ran the millinery department at Saks in Beverly Hills<sup>54</sup> where he designed hats for gossip columnists Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons.<sup>55</sup>



As he further developed his design skills, he transformed Peggy Lee's Los Angeles hilltop home, showcased on CBS's interview program *Person to Person* in 1960.<sup>56</sup> Ironically, in a piece published three weeks after his death, *Vogue* cited his design<sup>57</sup> for the "vast" new kitchen in Falcon Lair.<sup>58</sup>

Eduardo's partner Edmund Kara was the most prominent natural wood sculptor of his day<sup>59</sup> and apart from Miss Lee, Tirella counted among his personal friends Richard Burton, David Niven, Alan Ladd, Kim Novak and James Coburn.<sup>60</sup> He'd recently created Elizabeth Taylor's beach house for the 1965 Vincent Minnelli-directed Hollywood production, *The Sandpiper*<sup>61</sup> as well as sets for *Don't Make Waves*,<sup>62</sup> in which Sharon Tate co-starred with Curtis and Claudia Cardinale.

Eddie played cameos in both films.<sup>63</sup>

But after Doris Duke finished with him in court, he was relegated in the eyes of the jury to the status of celebrity sycophant.<sup>64</sup> By then, she had gone to great lengths to erase him from her own life as well as the public record.

## CHAPTER TWO

# LITIGIOUS & VINDICTIVE

Rough Point was built in 1892 for Frederick William Vanderbilt, <sup>65</sup> the grandson of “The Commodore” Cornelius, progenitor of the family responsible for six spectacular Newport estates. <sup>66</sup> The gardens were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted who gave Manhattan Central Park. Yet when James Buchanan “Buck” Duke bought it in 1922 he found the red sandstone and granite estate so inadequate that he added a new ballroom. Back then, he considered its “Great Room” too small to accommodate the coming-out party he envisioned one day for his beloved 10 year-old daughter, Doris. <sup>67</sup>

After his death, when she was presented to Society at the age of 17, some 600 guests celebrated on the final evening of Tennis Week at The Newport Casino, site of the first U.S. Open <sup>68</sup> On that night in 1930, two orchestras played at Rough Point as the tall blonde debutante sat next to her mother Nanaline. Five years earlier, her future had been cemented by a \$50,000,000 inheritance. <sup>69</sup> But as she sat under colored lights on a specially-constructed cliffside marquee amid the top shelf of Newport Society, Doris couldn’t have imagined that 36 years later, outside the gates of that very same estate, she’d be willing to kill the handsome younger man she’d been so close to.

In 1993 when she died in Los Angeles, leaving a fortune of \$1.3 billion and generating years of lawsuits involving her butler, Bernard Lafferty, accused of hastening her death,<sup>70</sup> Doris Duke's 2,900-word obituary was sprawled across  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of a page in *The New York Times*. But Eduardo Tirella, her trusted friend and advisor, earned only a single sentence of 34 words.<sup>71</sup>



**Rough Point 52 years to the day after Eduardo Tirella's Death.**  
(Adam Fithers photo)

In her *L.A. Times* obit, which was more than twice that long, he got two sentences; the second of which reported that “an inquest cleared Duke;” though there never was one:

Interior designer Eduardo Tirella was helping refurbish Duke's home in 1966 when he jumped from the driver's seat of her car to open the gates of her Newport mansion -- and the vehicle slammed into him. Although an inquest cleared Duke, who was in the passenger's seat, she turned more reclusive.<sup>72</sup>

“Doris Duke was bent on controlling the narrative of her mangled legacy,” said her one-time business manager, Patrick Mahn, the former NYU professor she put in charge of her finances in 1984. <sup>73</sup> “Litigation was her favorite foreplay.” <sup>74</sup>

Starting at age 13 when she sued her own mother, <sup>75</sup> Duke was involved in more than 40 lawsuits over the next seven decades. <sup>76</sup> “She could be incredibly vindictive,” says Mahn, who co-authored *Daddy’s Duchess*, a scathing Duke biography. <sup>77</sup> “After I left, she went bonkers and sicced the legal dogs on me.”

Her godson, Pony Duke, who co-wrote another bio entitled *Too Rich*, put it this way: “Doris gave no second chances. She collected people and then she threw them away.” <sup>78</sup>

Buck Duke, who made his first fortune with American Tobacco Company, creating the modern cigarette as we know it, <sup>79</sup> warned his daughter on his deathbed to, “Trust no one,” <sup>80</sup> and she’d been famously paranoid ever since. Dee Dee, as her few close friends called her, <sup>81</sup> was infamous for hiring ex-FBI agents to intimidate disgruntled friends and lovers who might be sources for reporters or biographers. <sup>82</sup> Columnists were harassed to print retractions. <sup>83</sup> Ex-staffers were threatened and bullied. Thirty-nine months before Tirella’s death, she slashed the arm of her common-law husband Joe Castro in that jealous rage. <sup>84</sup> Then, after Castro sued her for assault, he was effectively kidnapped in Hawaii by private investigators hired by her lawyers and induced to drop the suit. <sup>85</sup>

## THE MISSING PHOTO

The only known photograph of Doris and Eduardo, published on page 6, is strangely unaccounted for in the archives of Getty Images, owner of the Bettmann Archives which had previously licensed the photo. <sup>86</sup> The entire file of the Tirella wrongful death case is gone from R.I. Judicial Archives. <sup>87</sup> The file on the police “investigation” was reported missing from the Newport Police Department in 1990. <sup>88</sup> Even the negative of the photograph of the crashed 1966 Dodge Polara station wagon which made the front page of *The Newport Daily News* the next day, was selectively removed from archives at The Newport Historical Society. <sup>89</sup>

# Newport Daily News

VOL. 122—NO. 128

NEWPORT, R. I., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1966

12 PAGES

PRICE: SEVEN CENTS

## Local Forecast

Fair, mild tonight. Snow in the late afternoon, fair and continued warm.

(Detailed Report on Page 2)

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**DEATH VEHICLE** — Doris Duke's station wagon after it was raised to remove the body of Edward Tirella who was dragged across the street from her estate last night and killed. (Daily News Photo)

## Doris Duke Kills Friend In Crash

Newport police this morning the road, bleeding from head wounds to indicate where they were.

would question Doris Duke, who Police said an autopsy would be performed on Tirella today.

Police said that killed her 42-year-old male friend yesterday afternoon in Europe in World War II.

The victim was Edward Tirella, 42, of Dorchester, Mass., and helped years known as Duke's "boy."

Police said that killed her 42-year-old male friend yesterday afternoon in Europe in World War II.

The accident occurred about 10 miles from the crash site.

Police said that killed her 42-year-old male friend yesterday afternoon in Europe in World War II.



Doris Duke

### Daily News October 8<sup>th</sup> 1966 Headline + Missing Photo

Fifty-three years after Tirella's death in April, 2020, a laudatory 316-page biography, *The Silver Swan: In Search of Doris Duke*,<sup>90</sup> was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Authored by heiress Sallie Bingham, whose own papers are archived at Duke University, the book covers Tirella's brutal homicide in a scant 15 paragraphs and continues to perpetuate the "accident" theory -- demonstrating that even in death, the late billionaire maintains a firm grip on her troubled legend.

## THE CASE THAT GOT AWAY

The truth of what happened at Rough Point has gnawed at me for decades, ever since I started working as a cub reporter for *The Newport Daily News* eight months later.<sup>91</sup> I went on to report for ABC News as a correspondent on *20/20*, *Nightline* and *World News Tonight*<sup>92</sup> and over 13 years post-9/11, I wrote four investigative books on counter-terrorism and organized crime for HarperCollins.<sup>93</sup>

But when Donald Trump declared, "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any votes,"<sup>94</sup> a light bulb went off. The notion of a self-professed billionaire openly

bragging that he could get away with murder sent me back home to the story I should have covered in the summer of '67, when life and my career got in the way.

In 2010, during my investigation into the FBI's pursuit of al Qaeda, I'd worked with veteran NYPD Detective James Moss, of Brooklyn South Homicide. At that time, with the help of ex-FBI undercover operative Emad Salem, we cleared the 19-year-old unsolved murder of imam Mustafa Shalabi, who'd been shot and stabbed on Coney Island in 1991.<sup>95</sup>

If *that* trail of evidence had been cold, getting the truth behind Tirella's death would be an even bigger challenge, given Doris Duke's efforts at hagiography. But when I started to kick over rocks, I was surprised at the number of current Newporters who still had passionate opinions on the homicide. Dozens of members of the dedicated Facebook group, "If You Grew Up In Newport, RI Share Some Memories," regularly posted comments like, "I never believed it was an accident" and "If you have enough money, you can kill someone."

Another wrote, "I don't think we will ever know the real story."<sup>96</sup>

Taking that as a challenge, I began reaching out to people in that group who claimed to have personal knowledge of the incident. One identified the first cop on the scene who gave me a groundbreaking interview. I tracked down the first surviving civilian witness, then a young Navy nurse, who got there minutes after the crash and found Doris wandering back into Rough Point. I spoke at length with the investigator for the Registry of Motor Vehicles, now 87, who told me that he'd been prevented by the police from interviewing Miss Duke. I had a revealing conversation with a retired Newport Police detective who talked to Duke before she was locked away from that same State investigator in a private room at Newport Hospital.

I found a Newport Fire Captain who remembered visiting the scene as a 9-year-old. He was so taken by the prospect of re-examining the death, that he went up into the attic at Fire Headquarters and unearthed the original logbook from that fatal night, which helped me rewrite the timeline.

I even located the blacksmith hired to repair the two massive wrought-iron gates forced outward by the impact of the two-ton wagon.

Now 89, he told me that the damage to the seven-by-fifteen-foot gates was so severe that they were twisted and bent. Five of the gates' inch-thick iron baluster rungs were knocked out.

A crucial find turned out to be the stepson of the news photographer who arrived at the scene within minutes of the crash and took a series of heretofore unpublished photos that opened a new line of investigation. They show a Newport Police sergeant, who was the department's chief accident investigator at the time, working the scene shortly after the death. Ironically, 14 months later, I'd written a story in *The Daily News* about how he'd trained the Police Department's rookies.<sup>97</sup>

That sergeant's take on the death was a shocking scenario in which Eduardo had gone up onto the hood of the station wagon after Duke hit the gas and roared forward from a dead stop 15 feet from the gates. Still alive at that point, he might well have looked her in the eyes as the Dodge Polara burst out onto Bellevue Avenue. But then, as the sergeant saw it, Doris hesitated for a millisecond, causing Tirella to roll off. At that point, the sergeant believed, she made a decision to *commit*, hitting the accelerator one more time and dragging him under the vehicle to his death. This previously undisclosed copy of Eduardo's Death Certificate contains important clues (we'll discuss later) that support the sergeant's "up on the hood" analysis.

COPY OF CERTIFICATE OF DEATH STATE OF RHODE ISLAND									
1. NAME OF DECEASED <b>Eduardo</b>			2. DATE OF DEATH <b>October 7, 1966</b>						
3. PLACE OF DEATH <b>Newport</b>			4. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived. If Institution - Residence before admission) <b>California</b>						
5. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION <b>Newport</b>			6. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION <b>Los Angeles</b>						
7. MARITAL STATUS (If not in hospital, give street address) <b>Bellevue Avenue</b>			8. DATE OF BIRTH <b>8 June 1924</b>						
9. SEX <b>Male</b>			10. RACE <b>White</b>						
11. OCCUPATION (On the kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) <b>Interpreter Translations</b>			12. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) <b>New Jersey</b>						
13. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (If so, no. or number) <b>U/64, date out of date of service</b>			14. PLACE OF BIRTH OR BIRTHPLACE, IF ANY <b>USA</b>						
15. CLAUSE OF DEATH (State only and answer per line for (a), (b), and (c)) <b>Fractures of skull, ribs (rt) side of chest; Fractured right humerus, hip and 6 and 7 dorsal vertebrae; Subarachnoid hemorrhage; Transection of dorsal cord. Rupture of rt. lung and bilateral hemothorax. Multiple tears of spleen and liver. Multiple abrasions and contusions of body surface.</b>			16. AGE OF DECEASED <b>42</b>						
17. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO THE FOREGOING (State in Part II of form 17) <b>Decedent struck by auto while opening iron gates and then dragged under vehicle</b>			18. WAS AUTOPSY PERFORMED? <b>YES</b>						
19. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED <b>5:00</b>			20. SIGNATURE OF DECEASED <b>10-7-66</b>						

Back in 1966 I had no idea that this police sergeant had done an investigation of the case and effectively concluded that Doris had killed Eduardo Tirella with intent. When I finally I got the missing report I learned that those specific findings had been excised -- editing necessary at the time to justify Chief Radice's accident theory. But elsewhere in that document there is *prima facie* evidence of a cover-up at the highest level of The Newport Police Department.

One of the most important breakthroughs for me came when I located Donna Lohmeyer, Eduardo's niece, who had eight pages of trial transcript documenting how her father, a former Marine captain and engineer, had visited the crash site within hours after Eddie was declared DOA at Newport Hospital. He'd photographed what he described as parallel "gouges" an inch-and-a-half to two-inches deep, inside the gates. Those gouges were the width of tire tracks, suggesting that Miss Duke had gunned the station wagon's engine before it roared forward.

Donna also helped me find the undisclosed autopsy report from the County Assistant Medical Examiner, who signed on as Dee Dee's personal physician moments after pronouncing the death. He'd protected her within the walls of the hospital until her lawyers took over. When I learned that this official was Dr. Phillip C. McAllister, I was stunned, because he'd been *my own family doctor* growing up and I'd never had even a hint of his blatant conflict of interest.

In this case, the man legally charged with determining the cause of death had allowed himself to be paid to protect the killer. As we'll see later in this book, Dr. McAllister, a prominent member of the Newport medical community, would see his own personal life and career unravel in the years after he made the decision to protect Doris Duke.

## A BARGAIN MADE IN BLOOD

All of this reporting, which I'll go into in depth, leads to the unambiguous conclusion that on the eve of his departure, after Eduardo Tirella had declared that he was leaving her for good, the heir to one of America's greatest fortunes, exploded in a jealous rage, turned a vehicle into a murder weapon and crossed into the perilous territory of intentional homicide.



That's what I found after a two year investigation involving interviews with dozens of surviving witnesses and the accumulation of more than 10,000 pages of documentary evidence which underscore not just Doris Duke's *motive* for the murder, but the lengths that she, her attorneys, private investigators and press flacks went to in covering it up.

Keep in mind as you read this that a jury of seven women and five men found her civilly *negligent* in the homicide, the same way a civil jury later found O.J. Simpson liable after he was acquitted of criminal charges. The difference was that Simpson still owes some \$70 million in damages<sup>98</sup> for the wrongful death of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman, but in this instance, after shamelessly denigrating the decedent, the total award Doris Duke was on the hook for was only \$75,000, plus interest.

Another eye-opening discovery for me was that the five lawyers for Tirella's family shaved 42% of that damage award off the top. One of them included J. Joseph Nugent, the retired Attorney General of Rhode Island, who had initially pledged to get to the bottom of the anemic police investigation but later acquiesced to it.<sup>99</sup> He then sat in court during trial and charged the Tirella family the equivalent (today) of \$11,549.<sup>100</sup>

"In lieu of the proper damages," said his niece Donna, "all we have is Eddie's memory which I'm working to restore – to let people know the kind of man he was."

And what kind of woman was Doris Duke? One Newporter I found on that Facebook Group had a very pointed opinion. Denise Clement's late mother, Rosemarie, had been Chief Radice's secretary at the time of Tirella's death. In a lengthy interview in which she seemed happy to unburden herself after so many years, she told me this:

"Doris Duke *bought* the City of Newport and got away with murder. My mother read the full police report and knew that there was a cover-up, but there was nothing she could do. After she retired and we drove past those houses Doris had restored that helped Newport become a tourist destination, she'd say, 'It was blood money that paid for all this.'"<sup>101</sup>