

# VANITY FAIR

“My entire  
life has been  
a protest.”

## V I O L A D A V I S

THE HOLLYWOOD ICON  
*on* SPEAKING  
TRUTH *to* POWER

By SONIA SARAIYA

Photographs by  
DARIO CALMESE

UNDERCOVER  
IN THE  
*Church of*  
**TRUMP**

*Ghislaine*  
**MAXWELL'S**  
LIFE ON THE RUN

*Doris DUKE:*  
BILLIONAIRE.  
HEIRESS.  
MURDERER?


POOLSIDE WITH  
THE STARS OF  
**TIKTOK**

*SNEAK PEEK!*  
KEVIN KWAN'S  
**'SEX AND  
VANITY'**

**EXCLUSIVE**

The ex-Green Beret  
who broke Carlos Ghosn  
out of Japan





# HOMICIDE

The undercarriage  
of the vehicle  
(note the bloodstain  
on the ground) that  
killed Eduardo Tirella,  
October 1966.

# AT ROUGH

# POINT

In the fall of 1966, billionaire *Doris Duke* killed a close confidant in tony Newport, Rhode Island. Local police ruled the incident “an unfortunate accident.” Half a century later, compelling evidence suggests that the mercurial, vindictive tobacco heiress got away with murder

By PETER LANCE



# ON THE LAST FULL DAY OF HIS LIFE— OCTOBER 6, 1966—EDUARDO TIRELLA FLEW INTO NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, THE STORIED SUMMER COLONY OF THE COUNTRY'S OLD MONEY FAMILIES.

He was met at the airport by Doris Duke, the richest woman in America, and they drove to Rough Point, her 10-acre estate on Bellevue Avenue—Newport's Millionaire's Row. Eddie, as friends knew Tirella, had just told intimates that after a decade as the artistic curator and designer of Duke's estates in New Jersey, Bel Air, Honolulu, and Newport, he was planning to sever his professional ties with her, for good. Now, it was time to let his patron and constant companion know, face-to-face.

The handsome Tirella, a war hero and Renaissance man, had just finished advising on a new Tony Curtis film, *Don't Make Waves*, and was amping up his Hollywood career. Anxious to move to the West Coast full-time, he intended to load his effects into a rented Dodge station wagon, drop them at his family's home in New Jersey, and then fly back to California. But nobody left Doris Duke without consequences. Notoriously jealous and known for her violent temper, she'd once stabbed her common-law husband with

a butcher knife when he'd angered her. And Tirella, who was gay, had been warned by his lover and friends that Duke might overreact to his pending departure.

Late the next afternoon, Tirella and Duke had a heated argument, overheard by the estate's staff. Moments later, the pair got into the station wagon with Tirella behind the wheel and headed off for an appointment. Approaching the property's immense iron gates, Eduardo stopped the car and got out to unlock the chain that held them closed.

Suddenly, Duke slid into the driver's seat, released the parking brake, shifted into drive, and hit the accelerator. The two-ton wagon sped toward Tirella, burst through the gates, smashed a fence across the street, and crashed into a tree. As Duke sat stunned behind the wheel, Tirella's body lay crushed under the rear axle.

With massive injuries to his lungs, spinal cord, and brain, he died instantly. Ninety-six hours later, with no inquest—and basing their account of the crash entirely on the word of Duke—Newport police chief Joseph A. Radice declared the death accidental. Case closed.

**I**F DORIS DUKE is remembered at all today, it is as an eccentric tobacco heiress and philanthropist who, through her civic largesse, helped Newport regain much of its architectural glory of old. Down through the years, she acquired a curious assortment of friends, such as Imelda Marcos and Michael Jackson, along with a trail of lovers. Possessed of a voracious sexual appetite, she had rumored affairs with many an alpha male, including General George Patton and actors Errol Flynn and Marlon Brando. But New Englanders associate her most of all with Rough Point, her Newport mansion visited each year by thousands, who tour the stately rooms while guides lavish praise on the late billionaire.

Adding to this largely laudatory portrait is a new biography by author Sallie Bingham, *The Silver Swan: In Search of Doris Duke*, which devotes only 15 paragraphs to the homicide and continues to perpetuate the theory that Tirella's death was an accident. Drawing on previously undisclosed information from Duke's personal papers, Bingham treats her subject with a reverence that borders on hagiography. She describes Duke as a renegade; a singular, spectacular character forged in the Jazz Age; and a business savant who tripled her father's fortune—in short, as Bingham puts it, the very archetype of “the New Woman.”

OPENING PAGES: ED OUGLEV/COURTESY OF JOHN QUIGLEY; THESE PAGES: COURTESY OF DONNA LOHMEYER (TIRELLA); CECIL BEATON/CONDÉ NAST ARCHIVE

## OPPOSITES ATTRACT

**Below:** interior designer and Hollywood insider Eduardo “Eddie” Tirella, Doris Duke’s trusted adviser, circa 1960. **Opposite:** Duke, in a little-known Cecil Beaton portrait from the early 1930s.





## "SHE KILLED HIM TWICE. SHE DESTROYED HIS BODY, THEN EVISCERATED HIS MEMORY."

That picture reinforces the adulatory narrative, one that conveniently marginalizes Eduardo Tirella, her trusted companion for more than a decade. Indeed, when Duke died at age 80, in 1993—leaving a fortune of \$1.3 billion—her sprawling *New York Times* obituary mentioned him in only a single sentence.

**T**O UNDERSTAND WHY, it helps to understand the events that followed the crash.

Just eight days later, Duke donated \$25,000 (equal to \$199,000 today) to restore historic Cliff Walk, the public promenade behind the mansions that line Newport's shoreline. She also gave more than \$10,000 to Newport Hospital, where she'd been sequestered on the night Tirella was killed. In the following months, she began to set up the Newport Restoration Foundation, which, in time, would renovate 84 Colonial-era buildings. And that's not all. Seven months after Tirella's death, Radice retired, eventually purchasing a pair of Florida condos. The inspector who had questioned Duke after the incident was named as Radice's replacement, leapfrogging over his logical successor, the captain of detectives, to become the new chief. Another cop who had interviewed Duke was promoted to sergeant.

Townpeople were surprised by Duke's sudden burst of philanthropy. Today, Tirella's niece sees it not just as a cover-up but as something worse. "She killed him twice," Donna Lohmeyer told me. "She destroyed his body and then she eviscerated his memory." What's more, Duke went on to wage a protracted court battle, refusing to settle with Tirella's heirs, who had been willing to accept as little as \$200,000 in damages—at a time when Duke was making \$1 million a week *in interest* on her fortune.

Five years after "the accident," a Providence courtroom was the setting for a 10-day, \$1.25 million wrongful-death trial. According to the attorneys for the family, Tirella, 42, had earned \$43,000 (\$351,000 today) the year he died, and could have realized that sort of income for decades. Duke testified that she "always asked Eduardo's advice before buying or planning anything for her estates." He had counseled her on the purchase of art worth tens of millions and transformed the abandoned greenhouses on her New Jersey property into a spectacular botanical display. She had even set aside living quarters in each of her five estates to keep him close at hand.

In the end, Doris Duke was actually found negligent in Tirella's homicide. And yet during the damage phase of the trial, her lawyer portrayed him as a ne'er-do-well. The verdict: After legal fees and expenses, each of his five sisters and three brothers received \$5,620. "It was shameful, when you think of what he had done for her," says Pola Zanay, 86, an artist and longtime friend of Tirella's. "It was the worst kind of character assassination." And what could have been Duke's motive for killing Tirella? In Zanay's view, it was simple: "She hated the idea of *him* leaving *her*."

**A** GAY MAN IN the 1960s, Tirella, and his lover, Edmund Kara, a prominent sculptor, had many friends in the arts, including designers, musicians, and actors, such as Richard Burton, David Niven, James Coburn, and Sharon Tate. Tirella himself had an impressive background. He'd been a performer in New Jersey nightclubs in the early 1940s, falling in with Frank Sinatra. Tirella's niece Donna Lohmeyer says that her mother "remembered them coming home to eat Italian after some of Frank's dates at the Meadowbrook, where [bandleader] Tommy Dorsey played. But the war changed all that." In 1943, Tirella enlisted in the Army and shipped off to Europe, earning a Bronze Star for his service in the Battle of the Bulge. Once he returned Stateside, he took a job running the millinery department at Saks, creating hats for gossip doyennes Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. A talented interior designer as well, he was soon working on the houses of the well heeled and landing occasional parts in films. Tirella refurbished Peggy Lee's L.A. home and created Elizabeth Taylor's beach house for the 1965 Hollywood production *The Sandpiper*. *Vogue* even ran a piece featuring his design for the kitchen at Falcon Lair, the Duke mansion in Benedict Canyon, once owned by Rudolph Valentino.

Along with her estates, however, courtrooms were Duke's natural habitat. She had accumulated many enemies across the decades and generated years of legal cases, several involving her butler Bernard Lafferty, who was later accused of hastening her death. "Doris was bent on controlling the narrative of her mangled legacy," says her onetime business manager Patrick Mahn. As he told *New York* in 1993, "Litigation was her favorite foreplay." Starting at age 13, when Duke sued her own mother for control of her inheritance, she was involved in more than 40 lawsuits. "She could be incredibly vindictive," insists Mahn, who coauthored *Daddy's Duchess*, a scathing Duke biography. After he stopped working for her, Mahn claims, "she went bonkers and sicced the legal dogs on me." Her godson,

**TO THE MANOR BORN**  
**Above:** Duke's Newport, Rhode Island, estate, Rough Point. **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** Tirella in the early 1950s; Duke at Duke Gardens, Hillsboro, New Jersey, 1968; Duke in an undated glamour portrait; Tirella with actress Sharon Tate in Big Sur in the mid-'60s; Duke returning from a trip abroad, 1966. **(Background:** harborside at Newport.)

THIS PAGE: VINTAGE IMAGES/ALAMY; OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF DONNA LOHMEYER; PHILIP HARTINGTON/ALAMY; HULON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF DONNA LOHMEYER (TIRELLA & TATE); BRIDGMAN IMAGES; (BACKGROUND: IAN MCGILLIVRAY/ALAMY)





**“THIS TALL WOMAN WAS IN THE STREET, WALKING BACK AND FORTH, HYSTERICAL.” SHE TOLD POLICE SHE “HAD RUN OVER ED.”**



Pony Duke, who cowrote another tell-all, *Too Rich*, put it this way: “Doris gave no second chances. She collected people and then she threw them away.”

Some attribute her authoritarian personality to her father, James Buchanan Duke, who had made his first fortune with the American Tobacco Company. On his deathbed, he had reportedly warned his daughter, “Trust no one.” She’d been famously paranoid ever since.

Dee Dee, as her close friends called her, took to hiring ex-FBI agents to intimidate disgruntled friends and lovers who might be sources for reporters or biographers. Ex-staffers were threatened and bullied. Mysteriously, the entire case file for Tirella’s wrongful-death lawsuit has vanished from the Rhode Island Judicial Archives. In 1990, the dossier on the police investigation of the case was reported missing from the Newport Police Department. 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, disappeared from the archives at the Newport Historical Society.

The fire department’s logbook, however, still survives; it was recently discovered in the attic at headquarters. And its blunt description of the crash brings it all back into focus. According to the entry for that night, the first alarm came in at 5:07 p.m.: “Received call for auto accident...woman was hurt, car went (out) of control. Man...under car.” The 4,000-pound Dodge was so heavy that the power jacks on the ambulance couldn’t

raise it, so a tow truck was summoned. By 5:40 p.m., in separate vehicles, Doris Duke and the lifeless body of Eduardo Tirella were speeding toward Newport Hospital.

**I GREW UP IN** Newport, the Colonial capital that thrived on the triangle trade of molasses, rum—and slaves. The riches from those ventures helped finance the American Revolution. A century later, Gilded Age families like the Vanderbilts, Astors, and Belmonts built a necklace of “summer cottages” around Newport’s famed Ocean Drive. But since 1723, when 26 sailors were hanged as pirates on a warm summer day before what historians called “a jubilant crowd,” Newport has always been a town steeped in moral ambiguity: a bastion of religious tolerance built on the scourge of slavery. Jackie Kennedy, whose mother’s estate was in Newport, would sign on as Duke’s No. 2 on the Newport Restoration Foundation and, given Duke’s ongoing efforts to refurbish the town, few on Millionaire’s Row or in the working-class waterfront streets raised too many questions about that “unpleasantness” up at Rough Point back in 1966.

Eight months after Tirella’s death, I got my first job in journalism as a cub reporter for the *Newport Daily News*. I would go on to a career as an investigative reporter and network news correspondent, later writing books on counterterrorism and organized crime. But the truth of what happened at Rough Point gnawed at me.

Then, in 2016, when candidate Donald Trump declared, “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose any voters,” it took me back to that incident. Somehow, the notion of a billionaire openly bragging that he could get away with murder sent me home to the story I should have covered in the summer of ’67. I had to know: Was Eduardo Tirella’s death really an accident? Or did the heir to one of America’s great fortunes turn a vehicle into a murder weapon—then conspire with the local authorities to cover it up?

When I started to kick over rocks, I was surprised by the number of Newporters with passionate opinions about the “accident.” On one popular Newport Facebook group, members regularly dissect the details of the case. Using that portal as a starting point, I reached out to people who claimed to have personal knowledge of the crash or its aftermath. One was Denise Clement, whose late mother, Rosemarie, was Police Chief Radice’s secretary at the time. Today, she is adamant: “My mother always said Doris Duke *bought* the city of Newport and got away with murder. She read the full police report and knew that there was a cover-up. After she retired and we drove past those houses that Doris had restored, she’d say, ‘Blood money paid for all this.’”

Linda McFarlane Knierim’s Facebook entries stood out too. Her father had been the caretaker at Rough Point on what Linda called “that horrible night.” She posted: “The help were all in shock. When I came into the kitchen they were crying and holding each other. I believe they all thought it

was an accident. I know others believe differently.”

The more I dug into the mystery, the more I saw it as a story about class, privilege, and the concentration of wealth—one that resonates more than ever in the Trump era.

**O**N SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1966, the morning after Eduardo Tirella’s death, the lead story in the *Newport Daily News* would soon make international news: “Newport police this morning refused to indicate when they would question Doris Duke, who was at the wheel of a station wagon that killed her 42-year-old male friend yesterday afternoon.... The only witness was Miss Duke who was admitted to Newport Hospital suffering from facial cuts and severe shock.”

The article continued, “Dr. Philip C. McAllister, acting state medical examiner, said Tirella died instantly of brain injuries.” What the story didn’t reveal was that *after* Duke entered the hospital that night, McAllister, a Rhode Island official, agreed, then and there, to become her personal doctor. He promptly placed her in a secure, private room, which made it impossible for state investigators to question her. In effect, the man legally charged with determining the official cause of death had gone on Doris Duke’s payroll.

**SCENE OF THE CRIME**  
A view through the mansion’s smashed gates by news photographer Ed Quigley. **At far right:** detective Fred Newton, who had a surprising theory about how Tirella died.

ED QUIGLEY/COURTESY OF JOHN QUIGLEY





McAllister told a reporter for the New York *Daily News* he “doubted Miss Duke knew what had happened,” calling it a “freak accident.” Explaining why he’d decided to keep investigators at bay, he said, “It would have been inhumane to make her recall the tragedy so soon.” The reporter then asked if it could have been anything but an accident. “Unthinkable,” McAllister replied. “I think they were devoted.”

The first time the Newport PD was able to question Duke was on Sunday, October 9, two days after the crash. It was a brief interview conducted in her bedroom at Rough Point in the presence of her New York attorney, Wesley Fach, and her business manager. Lieutenant Frank Walsh took her statement along with Detective George Watts as Duke sat in bed, flanked by a pair of German shepherds.

That bedside encounter produced the first of two “official statements” by Duke. Both were contained in the formal police report, which had gone missing for decades. That is, until last fall, when a government official heard that I was digging into the Tirella matter and thought the truth should come out. Within a few days, the long-lost 16-page file was emailed to me.

The report, which I have since authenticated, contained two “interviews” with Duke. The first, dated October 9, was a brief, four-question transcript of the bedroom statement. The next day Chief Radice summarized that account for the Associated Press, adding that “Tirella... was crushed against the iron gates, and then dragged across Bellevue Avenue and pinned under the car.” Calling the incident “an unfortunate accident,” he declared the case closed.

But almost immediately, Radice was criticized by the state’s attorney general, J. Joseph Nugent, who announced that he was “dissatisfied” with the weekend investigation. The chief also came under fire for releasing scant information to the press, as reflected in a front-page

## I SAW IT AS A STORY OF CLASS, PRIVILEGE, AND WEALTH—ONE THAT RESONATES MORE THAN EVER IN THE TRUMP ERA.

story in the New York *Daily News*, headlined: “COPS CLAM UP ON DORIS QUIZ.” So Radice quickly walked back his verdict, insisting that the probe was still open.

It was at that point, according to Newport attorney William O’Connell, that Radice told Duke’s Rhode Island lawyer, Aram Arabian, that he needed something *more* to close out the case. So Arabian suggested that the police “write something up” and if he approved, Doris would sign it. O’Connell—who practiced law with a close associate of Arabian’s—insisted (and the official file confirms) that the police then created what they represented as a three-page transcript of an interrogation of Duke, purportedly conducted at Rough Point the following day. In fact, it was a “script” made to appear as the Q&A of a real-time interview so contrived that it got Duke’s birth date wrong—an error that she had to correct and initial by hand.

Five days after the accident—with this second “interview” inserted into the record—the case was finally closed. On Wednesday, October 12, the *New York Times* reported that “the police termed today as ‘Definitely an accident’ the death of Eduardo Tirella...Chief Radice said.” That same day, the chief of detectives told the *Providence Journal*, “There was no evidence of foul play.”

For the volatile heiress, it was over. Doris Duke escaped any criminal liability. And the \$75,000 in civil damages that she was later forced to pay to Tirella’s family didn’t even equal the cost of the Goddard Chippendale highboy she had bought a month before the trial, at Parke-Bernet, for \$102,000—a record price at the time for a piece of furniture.

The police report, however, was not the only account of the crash. Hunting through the National Archives, I managed to find a 173-page interrogatory prepared for a parallel case involving Avis Rent-a-Car Systems, the owner of the station wagon. Filed in federal court and presumably unseen for 50 years, it reveals additional admissions from Duke herself:

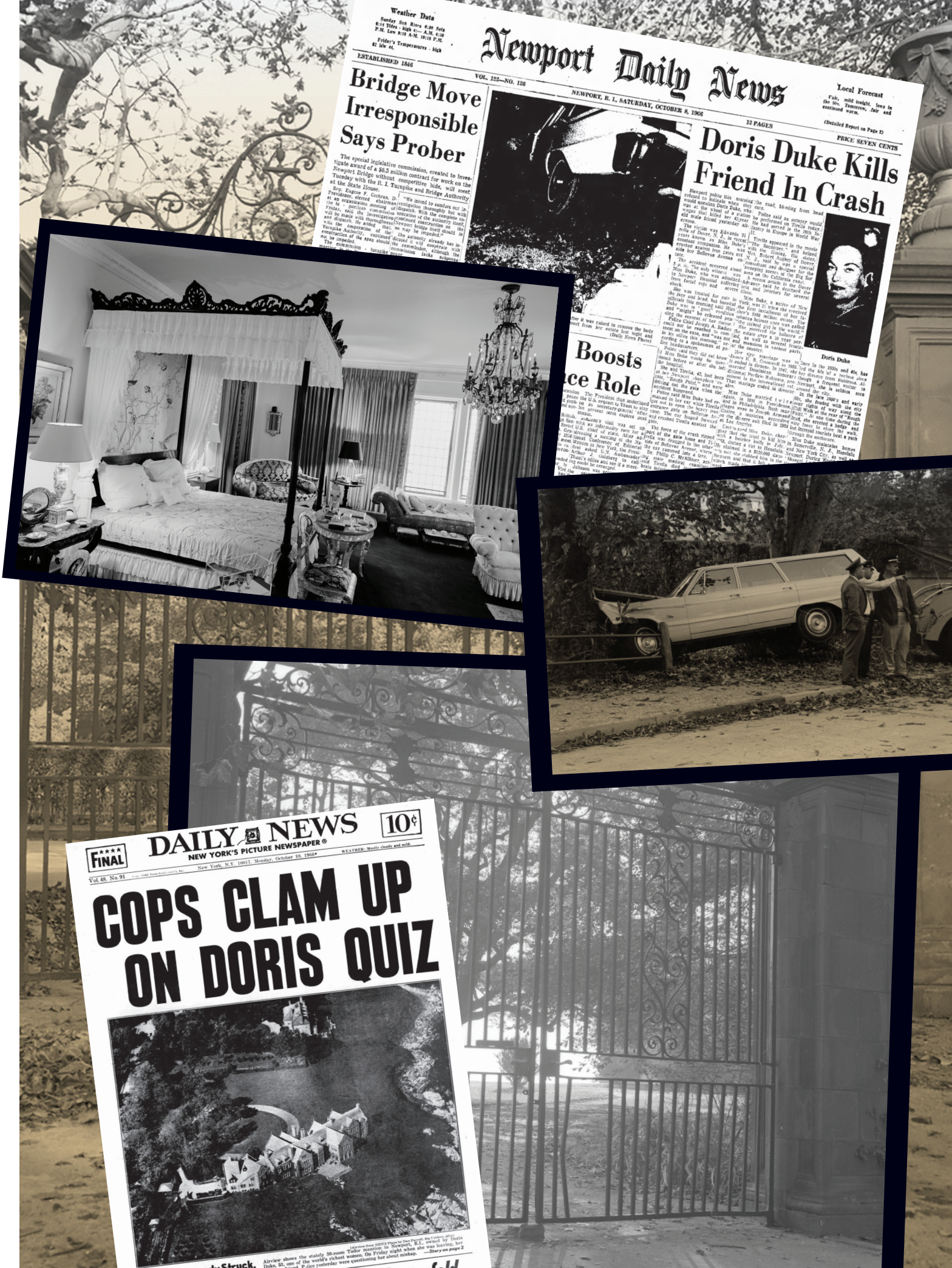
Edward Tirella drove the automobile up to 12 or 15 feet from the north gate. I was sitting in the passenger’s seat. He got out to open the gate which was locked. I moved over to the driver’s seat. I put my left foot on the brake and moved the gear shift lever from “park” to “drive.” The car immediately moved forward through the gates and across Bellevue Avenue where it struck a fence and stopped. I was injured and dazed. I looked around for Mr. Tirella. I did not see him. I went back into the house to see if he was there. A man and a woman helped me.

**A MAN AND A WOMAN.** The first civilians on the scene were Lewis Thom of Milwaukee and his daughter Judith, a nurse who’d just been commissioned as an ensign at the Newport Navy base. They were sightseeing at the time.

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**CRASH COURSE**  
**Above:** the antique that Tirella was en route to appraise the night he died.  
**Opposite, clockwise from top left:** Duke’s bedroom, where detectives “questioned” her; the next day the homicide dominated the local paper; the wrecked Dodge wagon; the estate’s gates were damaged in the crash—but, tellingly, Tirella’s legs were not; the New York *Daily News* reported that Newport police withheld information. **(Background:** the mansion’s gates.)

THIS PAGE: ADAM FITHERS. OPPOSITE PAGE: FROM TOP, NEWPORT DAILY NEWS, OCTOBER 8, 1946; ADAM FITHERS; ED OUGLEY; COURTESY OF JOHN OUGLEY; JERRY TAYLOR/COURTESY OF MARK TAYLOR (2); NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, OCTOBER 10, 1946





advisor straight away? Dozens of teachers on campus knew me and would have been in a position to help. I'd had literally hundreds of occasions to speak up. And I had chosen not to until now? Perhaps this was best left to the adolescents to understand. Perhaps the adults might acknowledge, with deep regret, that there really was nothing to discuss.

The rector did not admit that only one side had a legal obligation to report the assault to the police, and it wasn't me. The school had failed this first test. Concord Police knew nothing about it until my pediatrician called. It just so happened that the delay meant that they couldn't interview the boys before they left the state.

The rector only said, *Why didn't Lacy tell anyone?*

Dad replied, *She did. That's why we're having this conversation.*

**IN JULY**, a call came in. The school, in concert with legal counsel from the well-regarded Concord firm of Orr & Reno, wished to communicate a few things.

My father got out his graph paper. I was not invited into the library for the call, so I stayed upstairs in my room, with my door closed, and stared out the window over our driveway.

A knock at my door. My parents came in, looking pale.

I moved from my window to my twin bed and folded myself up in the middle of it. My parents stood side by side in front of me. Sitting small, I said, "What's up?"

Dad was the only one of them to speak. "The lawyer for the school says that you are not welcome to return to campus."

"What? Why?"

"Well, they have a list of things here that they are prepared to say about you. That is, if you agree to press charges against the boys, they will get you on the stand, and here's what they're going to say."

He held up his graph pad and read.

"One, Lacy is a drug user.

"Two, Lacy is a drug dealer, who has sold her Prozac and other drugs to students on campus, endangering them.

"Three, Lacy regularly abuses privileges and circumvents rules on campus.

"Four, Lacy is a promiscuous girl who has had intercourse with a number of boys on campus, including the accused.

"Five, Lacy is not welcome as a student at St. Paul's School."

Dad lowered the page and aimed his eyes at me, querulous and hard, with my mother beside him avoiding my face. The moment when he might have laughed at that drug-dealing bit had passed. They just stood

there, opaque, like a WASP update of that exhausted hardscrabble couple in *American Gothic*—graph paper instead of pitchfork clutched in Dad's hand.

I could not get past *Prozac*. I was hung up on that word. It sounds ugly to begin with, inorganic and cheap, and I had to dig a bit to even think why I was hearing it now. I'd never told anybody I'd taken the drug for a short while. Who told them? Why did they care? I'd never lost a pill, never given one away. The idea that I sold that or any other drug was insane. There was not a shred of evidence of that, not the smallest whisper.

Unless, of course, you were willing to flat-out lie. Unless you were willing to access a girl's medical records without her consent and share what you found there with the administration (and all of her schoolmates). Unless you were willing to manufacture accusations to poison the place for her and poison her for it. Then you could say whatever you wanted.

"Oh my God," I said. My throat was hard against the threat of vomit, which would have burned terribly.

"Basically," my father said, his voice rasping, "they're promising to destroy you." The rasp terrified me. My dad sounded so old.

I hadn't, up to this point, wanted to think of St. Paul's School as *they*. I'd fought the dissolution of the lawns and classes and people I knew into a faceless institution, monolithic and cruel. That had felt to me too easy, too binary—what you would say if you'd never been a student there. But I was the fool. This was not the game I'd thought it was, a civilized dance of virtue and discretion. I'd been so careful and so worried. They'd just quietly been taking aim.

Now my mother was looking at me imploringly. I tried to understand her meaning: What did she want? The fight, or not?

Dad continued. "Lacy, they're saying that you've had sexual partners."

I dragged my mind from the thought of being a Prozac dealer to the far less interesting accusation of teenage sex. *That's* what bothered him most?

He said, "That the two boys were not the only ones. Is that true?"

When I did not reply, my mother burst into tears. My father turned and took her into his arms. He looked over her shoulder at me and shook his head.

I said I was sorry.

Mom sobbed. He held her.

"It's not what we wanted for our daughter," he told me, and they left my room.

My mother did not come downstairs for dinner that night. She cooked and left bowls on the counter for my father to serve. My father was polite but cold.

I replayed his words in my head. *It's not what we wanted for our daughter*. It seemed

to me that all I had ever done was try to give them what they wanted. This, our mutual disappointment, might have given us an opening to talk to each other. But nobody started that conversation, so we never did.

**THE SCHOOL'S CHARACTERIZATION** of me as a drug dealer was the boldest lie I had ever encountered. Like all lies of its degree, existing wholly without truth, it felt violent. Discourse was now impossible. The conversation we'd been having with the school ceased. All speech that followed was cannily performative, every line parry or thrust. I imagine I could have convinced a court I had never sold drugs. Any student caught doing so was immediately and publicly disciplined, most likely expelled; besides, there was a tight ecosystem of students involved in illicit substances, and not one of them would claim membership with me. The assertion that I was selling Prozac rather than, say, cocaine, is laughable. But the intent of the accusation was not to posit fact. It was to threaten me.

**MY PARENTS DID NOT** speak to me again about what happened at St. Paul's. The conversation simply ended. At some point I made the necessary formal statement over the phone that I did not wish the police to move forward with criminal charges. It would have been hopeless to try to support their investigation without my parents supporting me.

As soon as it became clear that there would be no charges, the school, which had been so certain I was a criminal drug dealer, found no reason not to enroll me for the sixth form. I was welcomed back. Here was the contract, as I understood it: I would not speak of the assault, and they would not do anything to interfere with my applications to college or my progress toward graduation. My father had made it very clear to the school's lawyer that he expected this.

That was all just fine with the school. The damage to me was done.

**WHEN THE BOYS** did what they did to me, they denied the third person on that bed. I had no humanity. The impact of this violation only sharpened with time. My careful distinctions of injury and responsibility—the difference I imagined between *what they did* and *rape*, between terrible things you should put behind you and truly hellish things no one would expect you to bear—allowed me, for many years, to restore that third person to the room in my mind. I could pretend that having been permitted to keep my jeans on while being choked by cocks was something like agency. I worked—I still work—to restore the boys' humanity as a way of restoring mine: they were symptoms

of a sick system, they were tools of the patriarchy, they were fooled by porn.

But then the school went and did the same thing, denying my humanity, rewriting the character of a girl. It was the school's inhumanity that I could not—cannot—overcome. Because now I was up against an institution that subsumes human beings and presents a slick wall of rhetoric and ice where there should be thought and feeling. Thus is the world, this world, made.

I saw it everywhere.

**IN 2017, DURING** the New Hampshire state investigation into St. Paul's, I got hold of my records from the ear-nose-and-throat clinic in Concord. The outpatient report of my herpes diagnosis—the one the pediatrician

## Doris Duke



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 98 I tracked down Judith Thom Wartgow, now retired after 30 years as a paramedic. "We were driving down Bellevue Avenue," she recalls, "when we came upon this accident. The car was against a tree across the road from this open gate. When I got out, this tall woman was in the street, walking back and forth, hysterical. We started to look around the car to see if someone was hurt, when she took off for the house running, so I followed."

Once inside the mansion, Wartgow remembers, Duke ran up to the second floor, calling for someone, but she soon circled back outside. "I was trying to get her to stop," she says. She told police at the time that Duke "came down the stairs saying she had run over Ed." That recollection ran counter to Doris's claim in the Avis case that she'd rushed into the house in search of him. But by this point, Wartgow had gotten a good look at Doris's face. In the New York *Daily News* coverage of the crash, McAllister stated that Duke needed 30 stitches; the *Newport Daily News* noted that the two strangers who had arrived on the scene had found her "bleeding from head cuts." Five decades later, Wartgow disagrees emphatically. "No. She had a few bruises and scratches. But nothing where blood was running down her face." The ex-nurse seemed surprised by that detail, since she'd left Newport the next day and had never read the press accounts.

at school referred to—was not among them. It has vanished entirely. The records that remained of my visit appear woefully incomplete.

But what was there struck a note so sharp I could hear it, a chip of ice so cold it must be the hard center. It's small, not much. Just a phone message taken in the middle of the summer in 1991. I'd have been at home in Lake Forest, taking my Zovirax. John Buxton, the vice rector of St. Paul's School, had called this doctor in Concord to talk about me.

"Would like to speak with you about [a patient]," reads the message. He got his wish. "Call returned," noted someone else. "Sensitive matter."

John Buxton, a vice rector with whom I had never had a conversation and never

"Very little about the way the Newport police handled this had anything to do with responsible homicide investigation," says retired NYPD detective James Moss, who has cleared hundreds of murder cases for Brooklyn South Homicide. In 2018, I asked him to visit Newport to examine the evidence I'd uncovered. "You'd absolutely want to question witnesses in-depth on the relationship between the killer and decedent to determine if the death involved 'intent.' But they wrapped this one up on the basis of a fabricated Q&A requested by the person-of-interest's own lawyers. Astonishing."

**PRIOR TO THE CRASH**, Chief Radice, like many locals, had had his own run-ins with Duke. For years, she had unleashed her German shepherds to roam the Rough Point grounds, causing multiple attacks on passersby. In May 1964, after two tourists on Cliff Walk were victimized in a single week, Radice ordered "the destruction or removal" of two of the dogs. Doris, in response, erected a chain-link fence, effectively placing an impassable barrier along the walkway, one of the state's top tourist attractions.

Then, shortly after Tirella's death, Duke's foundation made that generous gift to restore Cliff Walk. The following May, Chief Radice retired after 42 years on the job. At the time, his annual salary had been \$7,000. Four years later, he bought the first of two condo units in a new building in Hollywood, Florida.

Today, Radice's granddaughter Elayne Paranzino says she's lived ever since with rumors that Radice, who died in 1997, had been bought off by Duke. "I confronted my grandfather one day," she contends. "I said, 'Don't you lie to me.' He said 'Elayne, none of these rumors are true. I didn't get any money from her.' Then, when I pressed him, he chuckled. 'You think I was paid off? You can have it if we can find it.'"

would, had known that I had visited this clinician in town and had called him directly to discuss my private medical records.

There could not have been a clearer instance of the ravenous paternalistic entitlement of this school, to help itself to my doctor and my privacy even in my absence.

**IT'S SO SIMPLE**, what happened at St. Paul's. It happens all the time, everywhere.

First, they refused to believe me. Then they shamed me. Then they silenced me. So I've written what happened, exactly as I remember. It is an effort of accompaniment as much as it is of witness: to go back to that girl leaving the boys' room on an October night, sneakers landing on the sandy path, and walk with her all the way home. ■

**DORIS DUKE'S TWO HUSBANDS** disappointed her in different ways. First, there was Palm Beach socialite James Cromwell, 16 years her senior, whose check bounced when he tried to pay for their 1935 honeymoon. Next came Dominican playboy Porfirio Rubirosa, whose legendary male endowment was compared to a pepper mill. Duke showered Rubirosa with gifts, including polo ponies and an estate in France. But the marriage eventually soured and they divorced in 1948.

Then, in the early '50s, Duke met a young jazz musician named Joseph Armand Castro, who would soon take her on the wildest ride of her long life. Fifteen years younger than Duke, Castro was a piano prodigy and band leader who played with everyone from Louis Armstrong to Zoot Sims. According to Stephanie Mansfield, author of the Duke biography *The Richest Girl in the World*, Joe first met Doris at a concert in Honolulu. She then invited him back to Shangri La, her Diamond Head estate. By 1953 they were living together at the Bel Air Hotel, and he later claimed that she bought Falcon Lair for the two of them.

Up through the early '60s, they were often in a booze-and-drug-fueled haze. Pony Duke observed that even though Duke believed Castro "to be a musical genius, perhaps the greatest jazz pianist in the world," over time she became envious of the attention he got onstage. Desperate he might leave her, Duke had frequent bouts of depression, deepened by alcohol, barbiturates, and Castro's temper. Their fights got more violent, and one night in 1963 at Shangri La, while Doris was playing a jazz piece, Castro supposedly made a crack, so she grabbed a butcher knife and slashed his arm.

On New Year's Day 1964, she threw him out of Falcon Lair. He soon filed the first of three lawsuits, including one for assault and battery, alleging that she'd "attempted to kill" him, causing "a large permanent scar" that prevented him from working. He asked



for \$150,000. But within weeks, Castro was strong-armed by Duke's attorneys, who held him incommunicado in Honolulu, persuading him, against his own lawyer's advice, to renounce his litigation.

Within a year or so, Duke coaxed Castro back to Falcon Lair, set up a recording company for him, and promised to include him in her will. She'd already bought him a Mercedes 300 SL 300, worth the equivalent of \$100,000. For the next year, things between them seemed to stabilize.

Then in the summer of 1965, her ex-husband Rubirosa was killed when he crashed his Ferrari 250 GT in Paris, and Doris lapsed into another depression. With Castro unable to console her, she spent more and more time with Tirella. By the following March, Duke, then 53, was growing angrier at Castro, after he was spotted with Loretta Haddad, a beautiful young singer.

In May 1966, Duke abruptly pulled the plug on Castro's record company, where Peter Brooke was an executive. Not long after, in author Mansfield's account, Brooke was awakened at 3 a.m. by a desperate Duke, begging him to rush over to Falcon Lair. When he got there, a maid led him into the kitchen where, as Mansfield tells it, "the room had been ransacked, broken dishes thrown on the floor. Standing in the open frame of a French window, wearing a T shirt, though naked from the waist down, was Castro, urinating over the railing into the garden below." Brooke reportedly found Duke in her bedroom with a broken jaw. "The next morning," Mansfield writes, "Doris fled Hollywood for Newport, accompanied by Eduardo Tirella."

**BY THE MID-1960S**, after toiling for Duke for years and getting routinely underpaid, Tirella had finally broken out. He got an up-front credit for his design work on *The Sandpiper*. His partner, Edmund Kara, sculpted the bust of Elizabeth Taylor that was a plot point in the film. Taylor's love interest was played by Charles Bronson, with whom Tirella appeared in a short scene shot at Nepenthe, a legendary restaurant high above the coast. "Between Big Sur and the house they shared in Laurel Canyon, Eduardo and Edmund had a full life," says Kara's friend Glen Cheda. "By 1966, they'd arrived at the epicenter of the West Coast art-and-music scene."

In the book *Canyon of Dreams*, critic Kirk Silsbee describes how "Tirella's renowned home parties [were] gatherings for creative people," including actors Alan Ladd and Dennis Hopper. "He had a little Morgan sports car," says his friend Pola Zanay, "and we'd drive up to Big Sur on Fridays. He and Edmund lived on an old Boy Scout camp near Nepenthe. On weekends they'd throw

*musicales*—Eduardo loved to sing, so he'd have Bobby Short playing the piano. Kim Novak lived up there. She and I would lie in a loft above the living area sipping Champagne. It was a fabulous time."

Around this period, Tirella was making the transition to set design, writes Silsbee, and that "didn't sit well with Doris Duke." After he went to work on his next film project, *Don't Make Waves*, costarring his close friend Sharon Tate, the tensions escalated. "Doris was panicked," observes Pony Duke in *Too Rich*. "Her entire life revolved around [Tirella's] ability to make things [for her] look beautiful. She pleaded with him not to leave her... [But] Tirella was tiring of Doris Duke's mood swings. He was worried that his motion picture design career was suffering because all of his time was being monopolized."

Events came to a head in the late summer of '66. "He was going back to Newport to tell her in person that he was leaving her employ," says Cheda. "Edmund felt strongly that he shouldn't go. He was fearful, because of his knowledge of what Doris was capable of." His niece Donna concurs, "He told us the same thing. But Uncle Eddie felt he could control Doris. It was going to be this final curating job, and he'd be out."

Zanay also recalls Tirella's reservations about making the trip. As a precaution, she says, he consulted a clairvoyant named Dr. Jacques Hondorus, nicknamed the Psychic to the Stars: "Eduardo really wanted to extricate himself from Doris's clutches. But it turned out that he needed major dental work that ran into the thousands of dollars. The only source he had to get that kind of money was by doing a job for her. So he went to Jacques to have a reading and Jacques advised him absolutely *not* to go back to Doris."

"What makes this story such a tragedy," she adds, "is that Eduardo was literally killed on the night before the rest of his life."

**THERE HAVE BEEN** various theories about where Tirella and Duke were headed that fateful Friday. Chief Radice maintained that they were on their way to dinner. And yet Linda McFarlane Knierim, the caretaker's daughter, insists, "My mom told me that they were going to meet somebody. A brief meeting. Because the cooks were preparing a meal for when they came back."

Harle Tinney, a neighbor of Duke's in the 1960s, supplies the answer. "One of my family's very best friends," she says, "was John Perkins Brown, an antique dealer in Newport. He approached us and said, 'I've acquired an extraordinary piece; the bust of a woman, 15th or 16th century.'" It was a reliquary, one of a number of artworks created over the centuries to contain the bone of a saint—in this case, Saint Ursula, who had been martyred in the fourth century A.D.

"John Brown offered to sell it for \$2,500," says Tinney, "but it was too rich for our blood. So, he said, 'I'll sell it to Doris.'" It took months to restore the piece and, before Duke took possession, she wanted it appraised. "She never bought a work of art without consulting Eduardo, and that's why she'd coaxed him back to Newport. They were on their way to John's shop, The Blue Cat, late that afternoon to pick it up."

And what about the staff at Rough Point, who were working in or around the 30-room mansion? Over the years, one theory of the crash stood out among the help. Some believed that because the estate's iron gates opened *inward*, Duke, unfamiliar with the rental car, had to put the vehicle in reverse to allow the gates to swing open freely, but, in her confusion, she hit the gas.

Johnny Nutt, Duke's former gardener, says that other staffers had a different take on the crash. "Miss Duke and Mr. Tirella," he told me, "had a big argument that night as they left the house. He wanted to go back to Hollywood to resume his career. They got in the car. Mr. Tirella was driving. He got out to open the gate, but he left it in drive with the emergency brake on. He was going to come back and get in the car, drive it through, and lock it behind him. But for some reason, Miss Duke decided to drive. She was a big woman, a lot taller than him, and as she slid across the seat to drive it out, her knee hit the brake release. The car jerked forward. She went to slam on the brake, but she hit the gas. That's the way I heard it."

Nutt's explanation is puzzling. First, because it suggests that Tirella intended to return to the vehicle and drive it after opening the gates. In her first statement to police, Duke had said that it was routine for her to slide over behind the wheel; something she'd done "a hundred times before."

Moreover, in many vehicles of that era the driver engaged the parking brake with his left foot and released it by pulling back on it. Still, it was difficult to believe, knowing Duke as well as he did, that Tirella would leave the car in *drive*—and turn his back on her—whether the parking brake was on or not. In fact, the owner's manual of the 1966 Dodge Polara clears things up. The parking brake on that model could *only* be disengaged by pulling a release lever located on the left side of the dashboard *by hand*. Not only would it have been impossible to release the brake on the floor by foot, but in some Polara models there was also an optional warning signal that flashed red when the brake was engaged.

As noted earlier, in the case against Avis, Duke stated that when Tirella got out to open the gate, "I moved over to the driver seat. I put my left foot on the brake and moved the gear shift lever from 'park' to 'drive.'" In the wrongful-death trial, Tirella family attorney Edward Friedman had declared that

"Miss Duke released the brake." Since releasing the brake would have been a conscious act, was it somehow possible that Duke mistook the gas for the brake? "Not likely," says ex-detective James Moss, "when you consider the size of the brake and accelerator pedals in that model wagon. The brake was horizontal, and the gas pedal was vertical. It defies belief that anyone could confuse them."

That conclusion was later confirmed by a state official who appeared on the scene that night. At 10:30 p.m., Lewis Perrotti, an investigator for the Rhode Island Registry of Motor Vehicles, arrived at the mansion, having driven from Providence. "I was by myself," says Perrotti, now 86. "It was dark. Using a flashlight, I saw tire marks in the driveway gravel inside the gate. Later that morning, my partner Al Masserone and I tried to question Doris Duke when she got back from the hospital, but a battery of lawyers had arrived, and they wouldn't let us see her."

By law, the registry's investigators were supposed to question all drivers in vehicular homicides. "They put us off all day and then the police said we could be present when they interviewed her on Sunday." But Perrotti says that when he and Masserone returned the following morning, they were told at the police station that the interview was already in progress.

"So, we rushed up to the estate. When we got there, they were just about finished. She was in bed with lawyers around her and two big dogs on either side. Lieutenant Walsh and the detective [Watts] were wrapping it up. We were allowed to observe, but we didn't get to ask her any questions. It was almost like the fix was already in."

The morning after Perrotti's first visit, Tirella's brother-in-law Robert Aughey, an engineer and former Marine captain, arrived at Rough Point with his teenage son, Robert Jr. They had driven from New Jersey, and at 6:30 a.m. the sun was just coming up. Aughey later testified under oath that he'd photographed tire-width "gouges" in the driveway, an inch and a half to 2 inches deep, 30 feet from the gate. "I remember those gouges clearly," Robert Jr. told me. "It was like someone was sitting in the car, stomped on the gas, and made deep impressions in the gravel."

**UNDER RHODE ISLAND** criminal law, the degree of culpability in a homicide hinges on the issue of intent. Apart from Murder One—typically reserved for the killing of law enforcement officers—second-degree murder is a function of "malice aforethought." Traffic deaths are usually associated with "manslaughter" because they involve accidents, which are, by definition, unintended. So what happened in this case? We know that Tirella got out of the car and walked to the gates. From Duke's October 9 bedroom statement, we know that Tirella had just enough

time to reach the lock when the station wagon "leaped forward." The damage to the gates shows that they were struck virtually head-on at a point when they were still closed.

With the help of Donna Lohmeyer, I managed to ferret out Tirella's official autopsy report, which had been misfiled in the basement of the Rhode Island medical examiner's office for five decades—under the name "Tirella, Edmund" (not Eduardo). It shows that his injuries were entirely inconsistent with the official theory of the crash. Although Duke had at first told the authorities that Tirella "was crushed against the iron gates," the report filed by the pathologist, Dr. James J. Flanagan, notes that except for a right hip fracture, all of Tirella's other injuries were to his *upper* body. He sustained zero damage to his legs.

The Polara wagon was six-and-a-half feet wide. It was idling 15 feet back from the gates, more than enough room to open them without Duke having to put the vehicle in reverse. Then, in an instant, it hurtled toward Tirella from a dead stop. And yet, all the damage to the gates occurred in an area below the level of Tirella's waist. So, if Doris Duke *had* crushed him against those gates, as she'd told police, why were there no injuries to his lower body?

The answer began to emerge when I got hold of an unpublished photo taken by a news photographer who'd shot the scene. It came to my attention courtesy of Jane Maguire. Her husband, John Quigley, was the stepson of the late Ed Quigley, who had been a photographer for the *Newport Daily News* when I worked there. I reached out to the Quigleys, who searched their basement and found some of Ed's old negatives and prints. Within that cache was a wide-angle shot of the crash scene. Visible near a bicycle, at left, are three of the five balusters that had snapped off the gates as they were bent outward, over the metal-covered "stop," embedded in the driveway to hold the gates in place.

Joseph G. Silvia, the 88-year-old blacksmith who'd repaired the gates, remembers that "they were exceptionally heavy. Wrought iron. It would have taken quite a bit of force for them to go up and over that stop."

The picture reveals something else significant: the man in the fedora at the lower right-hand of the frame. His name was Fred Newton, a detective sergeant. I went back and found a profile of him that I'd written in 1967 on how he'd trained all of the Newport PD's recruits. He was known as a straight shooter, who always conducted himself by the book. Over the years, I had lost touch with Fred, who'd died in 1999. But 14 years after Tirella's death, he'd become chief of the Newport PD himself, and my sense was that if anyone had discovered what *really* happened at Rough Point that night, it would have been Fred Newton.

And so he did. I finally learned what *he'd* learned after I located the first officer who showed up on the scene while Duke was still in the car, wedged against that tree.

**EDWARD ANGEL HAD** been a rookie patrolman assigned to "The Avenue" beat, along mansion row. On October 7, he'd just gone on duty at 5 p.m. Within minutes, the radio in his patrol unit crackled with word of an accident. He hit the roof lights and sped to the scene. "There was a woman inside the vehicle," he says. "She was extremely upset. I looked down and found someone underneath the car, all rolled up. I was inexperienced and young, so I blurted out, 'He's under the car.' That sent her into shock. She jumped out and, thank God, there was a young Navy nurse there"—Judith Thom Wartgow—"and I asked if she could help her. I was focused on whoever was under the vehicle, whether he was still alive."

A short while later, after Tirella's mangled frame was extricated, Angel pulled out a pad to make a sketch of the scene. "I walked into the middle of Bellevue [Avenue], looked down, and I saw some skin and blood," he says. "I drew a diagram of what I thought had been the point of impact between the subject and the vehicle—where I thought he'd been run over." In Angel's drawing, the impact—based on the blood and human remains he'd found—occurred not at the gate but out in the street.

Unclear as to who Tirella was—or his relation to the woman he now realized was Doris Duke—Patrolman Angel's first thought was that she'd hit a pedestrian crossing the avenue. "I submitted my findings," he recounts, "and the next day, I got called in by Sergeant Newton. He took me back up to the scene and showed me markings on the gates that suggested somebody had been forced up on the hood of the car. Then he walked me into the middle of Bellevue, explaining that the blood and the skin I'd found were from when the victim rolled off and fell in front of the car."

According to Angel, Fred Newton believed that Tirella went up on the hood of the wagon *before* it hit the gate. "That was his theory of the crash," he says. "Then at some point *after* the gates blew open, she hesitated, tapped the brakes and he rolled off. At that point he was run over by the vehicle and dragged to the point where he was still underneath it when it hit the tree." That would account for why the lower gates were pulverized but Tirella's legs were undamaged.

If Newton was correct, Doris Duke had killed Tirella with intent. In fact, according to the cumulative evidence, she engaged in four voluntary acts before she hit him. First, she slid behind the wheel. Next, she released the parking brake by hand. She then moved the shift lever from park to drive. Finally, she hit the accelerator. The wagon surged forward and struck Tirella, who went up on the hood. But instead of "crushing" him against



the gates, as Chief Radice had claimed, Tirella remained on the hood, alive, as the Dodge blew through the gates and roared onto Bellevue Avenue. At that point, according to what Sergeant Newton told Patrolman Angel, Tirella rolled off the hood, and she ran him over. In fact, in the official police report, Newton wrote that “tire marks...indicated” that Duke had “steered” the vehicle, which moved “with tremendous...acceleration.”

The deep, parallel, tire-wide gouge marks that Robert Aughey had photographed from 30 feet back support Newton’s sequence of events. The ’66 Dodge Polara was 18 feet long. The rear tires were three feet from the back bumper, so the math would have been right: the front bumper 15 feet from the gate—the tire gouges in the gravel 15 feet back from there. The distance from the gates to the tree was just under 80 feet.

Edward Friedman, the attorney for the Tirella family, had stated at trial that “Tirella was dragged about 40 feet and was pinned beneath the car when it stopped.” In other words, he was dragged from the middle of Bellevue Avenue—the very point where Angel had first noticed the blood and the skin. In the Quigley photo that depicts Newton at the gate, no residue of blood or remains is visible between the gate stop and the middle of the street. But another shot by Quigley, taken from under the Dodge, shows what looks like a large bloodstain.

Curiously, it was the negative of that very photo (shown on the opening spread of this story) that went missing from the *Newport Daily News* archives at the historical society. And yet John Quigley’s wife, Jane, found a print, made in 1966. What’s more, Robert Aughey Jr. recalls that the morning after

the crash he noticed a sticky substance near where his uncle’s body had come to rest. “I remember kneeling down and putting my fingers in it,” he says. “Lifting them up, they were bright red with blood.”

Newport police detective Al Conti, a retired 28-year veteran of many investigations along Bellevue Avenue, believes Fred Newton’s theory of the crash to be entirely plausible. “If it was me that night and I heard her coming and I’m facing the car,” he told me, “my first instinct would be to jump up on the hood. What happened to Mr. Tirella was outrageous, no matter what the cause, but to think that he might have seen his own death coming”—facing Duke from the other side of the windshield—“is an awful prospect to consider.”

I submitted all of this evidence to Harm Jansen, a senior staff engineer with Collision and Injury Dynamics, one of the nation’s top forensic consulting firms. This is his conclusion: “Based on my analysis of Sergeant Newton’s own diagrams in the police report, it’s clear that Doris Duke was on the accelerator for at least three seconds before the vehicle went through the gates. There is no evidence that Mr. Tirella was pinned against them. It’s clear that he went up on the hood, fell off, and got run over, mid-street. This was a multi-sequence event in which the driver made a number of affirmative decisions in the course of the incident. The analysis of his injuries, limited to upper body, the head-on damage to the lower sections of the gates, the account of Edward Angel, the first officer on the scene, and the contemporaneous investigation by the senior police accident investigator, Sergeant Newton, lead me to conclude that the event did *not* occur as described by Doris Duke.”

**FOR MONTHS AFTER** Eddie’s death, according to Tirella’s niece Donna Lohmeyer, Doris Duke would call her mother (Tirella’s

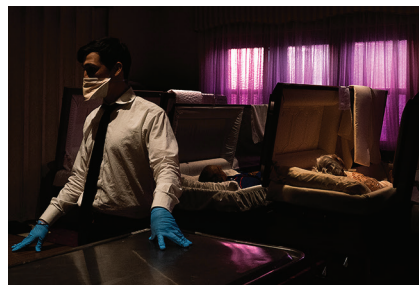
sister) late at night and weep with her over the phone. As Lohmeyer remembers, “Mom said Doris told her she kept a picture of him in a sterling silver frame next to her bed in every one of her estates.” But no such photo was on display in Duke’s bedroom at Rough Point when I recently visited there on the 52nd anniversary of Eduardo’s death.

In fact, in the 20 years that the estate has been open as a museum, Eduardo Tirella’s name was left out of the Duke narrative. Then in April 2019, after word circulated in Newport about this *Vanity Fair* investigation, a display was added to one wall in a rotating exhibition space. Its title: “The Accident at the Rough Point Gate.” The text reiterated the official police explanation of Tirella’s death, and, in an accompanying video, Rough Point’s curator called any suggestions to the contrary “a local myth.”

But if one takes a closer look at the interior of Rough Point, there is another connection to Tirella worth noting. Within weeks of his funeral, Duke took possession of the Saint Ursula reliquary—the artifact she’d asked him to appraise the evening she killed him. Eventually, Duke positioned it on a table in the main hall at the foot of the mansion’s large staircase. Every evening thereafter, when she went up to bed, that statue was there to remind her of “that horrible night.”

After Duke died, the old staff remembered how she had referred to that piece not as Saint Ursula, but Saint Cecilia, patron saint of music, whose feast day was November 22. That happened to be Doris Duke’s own birthday. In the end, this narcissistic woman—with enough money and power to view the world entirely through her own distorted lens—had even managed to recast that last work of art into her own image. ■

## Funeral Home



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 121 a bag,” she says. “Let the funeral home deal with it.” Patrick tried to push back on the hospitals but eventually realized they’d have to remove the equipment themselves. “These doctors and nurses, it’s not like they’re sitting on their hands doing nothing,” he says. “They’re overwhelmed. And you know what? This

person is now dead. And that’s my job, to take care of the dead.”

When staffers remove the tubing, they wear a shield and mask and cover the deceased’s face with a large piece of cotton. The intubation tube may contain a high viral load and takes a lot of strength to remove. “One of the scariest moments is taking this equipment out,” Yrcania says. “Imagine pulling as tightly as you can.” If a patient has an oxygen mask on for too long, it can create a sort of bedsore on the face and disfigure the mouth. The tan pads can distort the cheeks. It’s up to the funeral home to try to restore some of the damage.

Yrcania, married with two children, says she’s felt overwhelmed by the emotional strain of it all, as well as the 16-hour days that have kept her from her family. Her husband, Ian, has taken over the duties at home, caring

for their infant son and five-year-old daughter, making dinner, cleaning. Yrcania has missed her son’s first steps and first words, and she barely sees her daughter. “She wakes up, she goes, ‘Hi Mommy, see you tomorrow,’” Yrcania says. “At six o’clock in the morning, I’m forfeiting my family for strangers. But right now, we’re in a pandemic. This is nonnegotiable.”

**ON APRIL 27**, the crematory in Schenectady had a minor explosion in one of its gas chambers. The funeral home was planning to perform four or five cremations there a day. As a backup, Patrick began using a crematory in Connecticut roughly the same distance away. Getting another online quickly was critical. The funeral home serves a number of Guyanese families, many of whom are Hindu and require that cremation take place as soon as possible after the service.

The person making those crematory runs was Thomas Kearns. Like his younger brother Patrick, Thomas spent much of his time at the funeral home growing up. He’d get woken up in the middle of the night and tag along with his dad to perform a home removal. He worked as an attendant during wakes. He casketed bodies. “It was just the way it was,” he says. When Thomas went to college, he figured he’d become a funeral director and assume the family business. After all, he was named for both his father and great-grandfather, who started the funeral home. It didn’t much matter what he majored in because he’d end up in mortuary school, so he studied art history and loved it. Before long, he got sidetracked working with artists. “They were expecting me to take over,” he says. “Probably one of the hardest things I did was telling my father I wasn’t going to do it.”

Even without Thomas, the Kearns funeral home is a family affair: There’s Patrick, his brother-in-law Paul, and Paul’s son Sam, who’s an administrative assistant. But over the last couple of months, Patrick’s son, a high school math and physics teacher, came in to help, as well as Paul’s college-age daughter, Maeve, who started retrieving bodies from hospitals. When Thomas heard about his 19-year-old niece transporting corpses, he knew he had to help. He bought some plywood, constructed body boards, threw them into his truck, loaded his tools, and drove down from his home in Vermont. Before he left, he made sure his life insurance was paid up.

For weeks, Thomas woke around 4 a.m. and drove to the funeral home, where a van holding four to six bodies was waiting for him. By 4:30 a.m., he was on the road in the pitch-black, driving north on the interstate to crematories in Schenectady or Putnam, Connecticut. The solitary drive was the toughest part of his day, six hours on the road with nothing to think about other than the pandemic happening all around him. He kept his GPS on even though he’d already made the trip numerous times. He was worried he’d drive right past the exit, his mind elsewhere.

“Growing up being at the funeral home, if you had seven deceased people in an embalming room, it would be flooded. You couldn’t believe how busy you were. And I think during the height of the pandemic we had 70 one day. Which is just unfathomable. People everywhere. Embalming room filled. Morgue filled. One of the chapels is converted into where we’re dressing and casketing bodies,” Thomas says. “The scale of it is just unimaginable.”

In late April, stories surfaced of dozens of decomposing bodies found in trucks at a Brooklyn funeral home. The owner, Andrew Cleckley, told reporters he’d been overwhelmed by the number of bodies and had been using the trucks for overflow storage after already filling his chapel with

more than 100 bodies. “There are a few others that might be in over their heads,” Patrick says. “Trust me, it’s easy to get over your head here.” While hospitals received significant attention from state and local governments throughout the crisis, funeral homes like Kearns were generally left to figure things out for themselves. “I felt on my own,” Patrick says. “The mayor’s office was completely clueless at first.”

The problems at the funeral home in Brooklyn pushed the city to become more responsive to how overwhelmed the entire funeral home industry had become. City officials didn’t want another incident of bodies decomposing in trucks. Now, they were reaching out. Do you need anything? Can we help? Weeks earlier, the medical examiner had extended the deadline to retrieve bodies from 6 days to 14. Now the city said that funeral directors could send bodies back if they got overstretched. Patrick says that’s never happened before. The medical examiner also removed the deadline for sending bodies to Hart Island, placing them in long-term cold storage instead. “The city’s come around 180 degrees.”

By early May, Patrick began seeing signs of progress. The death and infection rates were trending downward. They were performing four or five funerals a day, about half as many as in early April. Around this time, Patrick learned that he had indeed contracted the virus. That rainy, cold March night when he experienced back pain was likely a mild symptom of COVID-19. He now has the antibodies. He thinks he probably got the virus from relatives of a COVID-19 patient rather than a body in the funeral home. But he’ll never really know.

**THE FUNERAL HOME’S** main office is located in a squat brown-brick building on a street in South Richmond Hill that’s half residential, half commercial. On a mid-May morning, staffers were directing a funeral in a chapel that had been split in half—one part used for viewings, the other for staff to prepare bodies. There, Jose Soto was dressing the body of a man who had died on his 73rd birthday. He was mostly bald with red splotches on the top of his head. On the right side of his face was a blackish bruise. His hospital wristband was still attached. “He needs his makeup done,” Jose said.

Next to him was a larger man in his 20s with a tattoo on his right biceps that had a woman’s name in script above a red heart. Nearby, an elderly woman dressed in a purple blouse and floral scarf was already in her casket. Inside was a photo of her holding yellow flowers. An older woman with gray streaks through her black hair was lying on a stretcher next to an overweight woman. Three of the five bodies here were probable COVID-19 cases, and a fourth, the man Jose

was dressing, was first believed to have had COVID-19 and put on a ventilator but later tested negative. Jose dressed him in a white T-shirt and a pair of black suit pants. In the garage, he then helped put several other bodies inside cardboard containers, “HANDLE WITH CARE” printed in green on the side of each one. He checked one of the bodies for a pacemaker, which can explode inside a crematory. Nothing. Jose zipped up the body bag and closed the container’s cardboard lid. Several staffers helped place the box on a dolly and loaded it into a van. Patrick shut the doors. The bodies would be driven to Connecticut tomorrow.

That afternoon Yrcania told me about her friend’s father, who she called Papito, and who had died of COVID-19 a few weeks earlier. Yrcania had vacationed with him. Some funeral directors might not want to arrange a funeral for someone they knew. But she did. Yrcania embalmed him and dressed him in a gray suit with a coral necktie. It was the same suit she remembers Papito wearing when he walked his daughter down the aisle. “I cried a lot,” Yrcania says. “What got me was scooping him up, that I had him in my hands. It broke my heart that he was in a state where I could lift him.”

That afternoon, Yrcania finished dressing the man who died on his birthday. She placed him in a dark suit jacket and a navy tie, loosely tying it around her neck first to get the knot right. Nearby, Jose was shaving the man with the heart tattoo. The sun began setting, splashing through the pinkish stained glass windows and white curtains. Yrcania put cover-up cream on the man she was prepping and pointed out what looked like a bedsore underneath his chin, likely an injury from the ventilator that doctors initially put him on. She lightly shaved the gray hair on the side of his head. “That’s much better,” she said. She thought again of her friend’s father whom she’d prepared. “I enjoyed getting him ready. I really enjoyed it,” she said. “Getting him all dressed up. I like getting them ready to go wherever they’re going. Because we are the last caregiver.”

For now, the place this man was going was on the other side of the divider for tomorrow’s service, his face no longer showing any signs of bruising, no apparent marks from the ventilator. He was trimmed and dressed in his finest dark suit. The staff hung a gold and silver crucifix on the inside of the open section of his casket and placed a brown kneeler in front for prayers. He was ready for the morning viewing.

**ON MAY 17** in the early evening, Patrick had left work by 6:30 p.m., the earliest he’d gotten out of the office in weeks. At home, he received two more calls. Two more families who needed help. But things were slowing down enough for him to start thinking