

DONNA LOHMEYER

March 23, 2021 VIA EMAIL

Mark Thompson  
Executive Director  
Newport Restoration Foundation  
51 Touro Street  
Newport, RI 02840 (401) 849-7300  
**[mthompson@newportrestoration.org](mailto:mthompson@newportrestoration.org)**

Mr. Thompson,

I am the niece of Eduardo Tirella, who, as you know, was killed on October 7th, 1966 by Doris Duke, founder of the very non-profit that you lead. As the daughter of Eddie's closest sibling (my mother, Anita Tirella Aughey), I have been shocked at the utter indifference the NRF has shown to the revelations regarding what the Newport Police falsely called "an accident" uncovered by Emmy Award-winning former ABC News correspondent and author Peter Lance. They were first reported in the July/August issue of [Vanity Fair](#) and more recently in his 438 page book **HOMICIDE AT ROUGH POINT**.

In the early stages of his investigation in 2018, Mr. Lance reached out to me and I told him that I had been waiting for decades for someone to find justice for Eddie, whom Miss Duke killed twice. As I told Mr. Lance, "She destroyed his body, then eviscerated his memory," during the 1971 wrongful death trial.

That was the civil action she forced my family to file after she steadfastly refused to settle with them for as little as \$200,000, at a point when she was earning interest of \$1 million a week on her fortune .

Imagine my shock, the following summer of 2019, when I visited Rough Point and saw the attached exhibit sprawled across an entire wall on the second floor rotating-exhibit space.

It contained a series of material misstatements of fact, including 1) the insistence that Eddie and Doris were on their way "to dinner that evening," when Peter Lance documented that they were on their way to pick up the Reliquary of St. Ursula from John Perkins Brown, who became the first Executive Director of the NRF, and 2) that Doris was "unfamiliar with the transmission" in the rented car, when, as Peter documented, she had admitted to driving the vehicle twice earlier.

Worse, at the end of the exhibit, memorialized on that wall was a statement, referring to the 1971 trial in which Doris was found civilly liable -- a statement that the NRF had to know was false, based on Doris's own files at Duke University: "After several days in court, Duke settled the case with the Tirella family."

In point of fact, files which Peter Lance referenced in his sixty (60) pages of annotations in the book, prove that Doris and her lawyers rejected an offer by my family to avoid trial for a settlement of as little as \$200,000, and then, during the damage phase of trial, after her attorney denigrated Eddie's reputation, the final judgement that Doris was ordered by the court to pay was only \$75,000 plus interest. There was never a settlement.

For the NRF to continue to insist that there was, casts my family in a false light and insults Eduardo Tirella's memory.

Further, to compound those three misstatements of fact, the NRF produced a video that first aired on April 2, 2019. As of yesterday it had 1,592 views ON YOUTUBE. It is narrated by Kristen Costa, Senior Curator at the NRF, who lightheartedly describes the perception, among Newporters, about Eduardo's death as "a local myth." That statement is incredibly offensive to my family and his memory.

I did not visit Rough Point in 2020 but was further shocked to learn that the NRF, which heretofore had rotated exhibits in that space, maintained that same exhibit during the entire 2020 season.

So the cover-up continued.

Now, despite Peter Lance's 8,000-word piece in Vanity Fair, which has remained unchallenged since publication July 16th and his 130,000 word book, published February 23rd, 2021, which the NRF has had ample time to read, you have republished those falsehoods on that wall-sized exhibit for all of your visitors to see during the 2021 season - an exhibit which continues to cast my family in a false light.

The NRF's reckless disregard for the truth has been compounded by the statement you released on February 18th, 2021 in response to a request from R.J. Heim of WJAR-TV who produced a four-part series on Peter Lance's findings which aired from March 8th through 11th, 2021:

"Newport Restoration Foundation is aware of the forthcoming book, "Homicide At Rough Point." The Newport Police Department investigated the incident, which is the subject of the book, at the time it took place and ruled that it was an accident. NRF does not have the capacity nor resources to conduct a separate investigation of the accident but we are confident in the Newport police and the conclusions reached in their official investigation."

As Peter Lance correctly asked in a letter to the editor of Newport This Week: "If a nonprofit, whose very raison d'être is scholarly research and analysis can't verify my findings, then who can?" He points out that "The NRF certainly has the resources." The Foundation's 2018 IRS 990 filed July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, which he links to on his website, demonstrates that in 2018, NRF "paid its top five employees and board members salaries and benefits of \$731,315." Further, as that IRS 990 demonstrates, the fair market assets of the NRF are \$75,816,493. Finally in CHAPTER 34 of his book, Peter documents continuing affirmative efforts by the NRF to cover up the truth behind his findings

Consider this a notice that the Newport Restoration Foundation owes me and my family truth and transparency. You need to take affirmative action to mitigate before you cause us additional damages. Taking the word of Chief Joseph A. Radice, whom Peter Lance proves closed the case in a corrupt conspiracy with Doris Duke's attorneys - going so far as to fabricate a 3-page transcript of an interrogation that never took place - is simply an untenable position for the NRF.

Please get back to me forthwith

Sincerely,

Donna Aughey Lohmeyer

**SEE Signed pdf of this letter attached along with one page enclosure attached.**

cc: R. J. Heim: [rjheim@wjar.com](mailto:rjheim@wjar.com) [RJHEIM10@cox.net](mailto:RJHEIM10@cox.net)

## The Accident at the Rough Point Gate

On the evening of October 7, 1966, Doris's friend and interior designer, Eduardo Tirella, was struck and killed while opening the front gate at Rough Point. Doris was driving the car. While we can never know exactly what happened, it is undeniably a tragic event.

We do know that Tirella and Doris were on their way to dinner that evening. She was driving a rented car and unfamiliar with the transmission. Eyewitnesses said Doris was incoherent and clearly in shock following the incident.

Many rumors and half-truths surround this tragedy. Some say Tirella was Duke's lover and he had wronged her, so she killed him- except that Tirella had romantic relationships with men. Some locals claim Doris paid off the Newport Police chief (who retired six months later) and her \$25,000 donation to the Cliff Walk restoration was hush money for the accident.

Perhaps the most persistent tale is that Doris Duke founded the Newport Restoration Foundation as a way of apologizing to the city. While Doris Duke did found NRF two years after the accident, she had been in talks with other preservationists about possible historic preservation projects as early as 1965, based on correspondence in the Doris Duke Archives at Duke University.

In 1971, the Tirella family brought a civil suit against Doris Duke for damages and lost wages from Eduardo's death. After several days in court, Duke settled the case with the Tirella family.



## The exhibit photographed in April, 2019.



## 2020: A YEAR OF CARE AND CREATIVITY AT NRF'S MUSEUMS

January 25, 2021

On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, the museums of NRF completed their 2020 season, and the museum staff closed Rough Point to the public until our reopening in early spring of 2021. Because I am a tad superstitious, I have held off on writing about the success (and challenges) of the season. However, now that it is well and fully over, and thankfully with no reported cases of COVID-19 from any of our visitors or front-line staff during the season, I can finally take the rabbit's foot out of my pocket, the horseshoe off my doorway, stop asking the Magic 8 Ball for predictions about the future, and share a little bit about how it all turned out.

## The Exhibit at the end of the 2020 season as cited in the January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021 NRF newsletter.