CASE 16972 - Application of
Tuc Place Foundation

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My name is Frances Snider, and I reside at 1607 31st Street, NW, Washington, DC. For more than thirty years I have loved watching from my window for the first sign of spring -- the daffodils that bloom at the base of the ancient Tudor Place Poplar.

I want to make it perfectly clear that I would be delighted to have Tudor Place as my neighbor if it would operate as the house museum that the Peter family intended it to be. What does not delight me is, in my view, the quixotic management style of those in charge and the cavalier manner in which the neighbors have been treated. Here are some examples of what I mean.

When the conversion from private home to house museum was being finalized some years ago, we were invited to a reception and tour of the property where the planned operation was explained and we were assured that Tudor Place would remain a good neighbor. It seemed strange to me that a number of our neighbors were not there. I subsequently learned that only the neighbors who resided immediately adjacent to or across from Tudor Place were invited. When I asked Tudor Place staff about this, emphasizing that this museum would impact more than the immediate neighbors, I was brushed off.

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When the museum opened, Tudor Place frequently posted official temporary "no parking" signs along its entire 31st Street boundary. These were, of course, really "reserved parking" signs for the guests at a particular event. When I complained to Mr. Mackee, the first Tudor Place Curator, that this was not only a misuse of the "no parking" signs, but a terrible inconvenience for many of the residents who have no off-street parking, he replied, "It's our property, and we can do what we want with it!"

On another occasion a few years later, when the signs were up again, I asked an employee who was doing some maintenance work near the gate what was happening this time and pointed out (again) that this appeared to be a misuse of the "no parking" signs. I received a lecture on my ingratitude for all that Tudor Place does for me and for Georgetown. The lecture ended with, "What are you complaining about? Parking is easier on this block than anywhere else in Georgetown!"

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Once I asked Tudor Place to donate a tour for six people to my son's school auction, to be combined with refreshments afterwards at our house. The request was declined in writing because the terms of the Tudor Place trust forbade the museum from contributing to any group with which the Peter Family had not been previously connected. The Tudor Place staff could find no record of any Peter family involvement with St. Anselm's Abbey School. I was surprised to hear that the Trust had such restrictive terms but accepted the response as valid. Imagine my astonishment when, several years later, Tudor Place sponsored a large, loud Halloween birthday party and fund raiser for Councilman Jack Evans. I have yet to learn how Councilman Evans was previously connected with the Peter Family.

Then there was the year I almost missed graduation, a required event, at the school where I was employed. When I noticed a uniformed DC policeman diverting traffic at 31st and Que Streets, I rushed out to ask what was happening. He informed me that the bride and groom were preparing to leave the wedding going on at Tudor Place. (I certainly knew a large wedding occurring – one could not miss the music, the noise, and the abundance of cars.) If I had to go anywhere, I'd better get going right away, or I likely wouldn't be able to get out for at least half an hour. I hastily grabbed my unpressed academic gown and hood and dashed to the car. The policeman kindly moved the traffic cones so that I could make my escape.

When I complained about the continuing large, loud, and late events at Tudor Place, complete with amplified bands, noisy guests, and parking problems, Mr. Huntington Block, then the Acting Curator, pointed out that Tudor Place had provided the neighbors with a schedule of upcoming events. He suggested that if these bothered me, I should absent myself from my home and the neighborhood while they were occurring.

There were the back-to-back corporate parties during an IMF meeting, complete with multi-colored laser light shows, loud music, traffic congestion, valet parking, a bar on the lawn at 1670 31st Street (Dower House), and a table with a lamp on the sidewalk for the name tags. My husband needed to pick me up from work because I was recovering from foot surgery and walking with a cane. The closest parking spot we found was on R Street near 30th. He could not even drive up 31st to drop me in front of our house near Que Street.

As we walked down 31st, we were greeted cordially by the party host and offered a drink at the bar while he found our name tags. We informed him that we were not guests but angry residents and proceeded to the main house to voice our complaints. Again, we were greeted warmly by Tudor Place staff until they learned who were. We were quickly hustled down the steep staircase to the basement office, cane and all. We were offered a pro-forma apology and escorted out – all the way to the sidewalk.

As Christmas approached, a Tudor Place staff member arrived with a large, lavish Christmas wreath that my husband tried to refuse. He knew that I would consider this an attempt to bribe us into withdrawing our complaints. The staff member insisted on leaving it, anyway. When I returned from an errand and learned of this, I immediately threw it away. A neighbor who had consistently been excluded from any Tudor Place communications because her property was not on the Tudor Place perimeter, appropriated it, stating that, "It's probably the one and only benefit I'll ever receive from living near Tudor Place."

We are asked to "trust Tudor Place to do the right thing." How can we do that when, as these incidents illustrate, with each change in Tudor Place administration, we've had to fight the same battles over and over?

I would imagine that at least some of the Tudor Place staff and board members sincerely believe that they are fulfilling the Peter Family vision for this wonderful property by constantly pushing to expand the operation. And in order to do that, they probably need to stage large, lavish events, rent the property for huge sums of money, and hire more and more staff. But big is not always better, at least not from the point of view of this long-time homeowner in what is supposed to be a residential neighborhood. I would certainly prefer to be spending my time and money supporting the appropriate events that Tudor Place sponsors rather than constantly struggling to prevent the inappropriate ones.

Frances B Anderson