Tudor Place, BZA Hearing

My name is Niente Smith. I live at 3116 P St. I have lived in Georgetown for 35 years, and have spent much of those years trying to preserve and protect our historic village. I have been a member of CAG since 1970, owned an antique business throughout the 70's and early 80's, and during those years I belonged to the Business and Professional Assoc. of Georgetown. I served for many years on the boards of the HSW and The Foundation for The Preservation of Historic Georgetown, and in 1983 I gave an open space and historic façade easement on our 1830 home that will prevent development in perpetuity on our otherwise developable side lot. In short I love Georgetown and think the gift of Tudor Place with its easement, the beautiful and very historic house museum is one of the finest things that's ever happened to Georgetown. Only the family who had built the house and witnessed the nearly 200 years of historic events that took place there could understand the magnitude of such a gift

On my first visit to Tudor Place, I was picking up photographs from Mr. Peter for "The City of Washington, An Illustrated History" that was published in 1977. I knew I wouldn't get past the front door, but was awestruck just to be that close. After Mr. Peter died, I served on the Committee for the Long Range Plan for the Collections before the Museum opened. Since then I have served on many committees, chaired the Garden Party, and served on the Board, all of which I consider a great privilege. My observations and experiences at Tudor Place have left me in a position to know the institutions goals and intentions. Their neighbors and the larger Georgetown constituency are most important to Tudor Place, as they were to the Peters in 1806; they are to the Foundation in 2003 and will be for the many years ahead.
>Currently and historically almost half of our Board come from Georgetown.
>There is an active program to communicate and cooperate with neighbors. When complaints are received immediate action is taken to correct the problem.
>Neighbors are welcome in the gardens free of charge.
>Neighbors are often invited to participate in events. In fact, some events like Fall Garden Day are planned specifically with the neighbors and their families in mind.

There was a time some years ago when the case for rentals at Tudor Place was very compelling, not only for the income that the rentals brought, but there were other benefits. The hosts of such events were often friends of Tudor Place, and guests of the events often became supporters. The tent paid and erected for weddings was left up to benefit of the Garden Party. Caterers who profited from those events gave Tudor Place favorable rates for museum functions. However it did not take long for the negatives from rentals to overwhelm the benefits. We were beginning to receive complaints from our neighbors. Our small staff was sorely put upon to manage their very busy jobs with increasing competition from events. Most importantly we were beginning to feel the wear and tear on the property, our #1 priority.

At about the same time, the Board was faced with hiring a new Director. The new Director came from the Women's Museum, and as she brought other Women's Museum

Case No. 16974
Exhibit No. 83
Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 16974
EXHIBIT NO. 83

staff with her, it became clear that the primary direction Tudor Place was taking was down the rental events path, a la The Women's Museum.

The only prospect worse than replacing our original Director was the prospect of having to replace his successor. It became however the positive and pivotal event that brought about the refocusing of the institution back to our primary purpose, the stewardship of the historic house and museum education. The refocusing also, after a yearlong search brought us Leslie Buhler. Leslie is not only an honest and eloquent spokesman for Tudor Place and the Board, but she very accurately reflects our collective goals.

In closing I would like draw an analogy. My home is across the street from Georgetown Presbyterian Church, where there is a wedding, complete with limos, "no parking" signs, and bagpipes, nearly every Saturday of the year. The Church is also home to a preschool whose wee students are loaded and unloaded in front of and occasionally in my driveway twice a day five days a week. Would I seek to alter the church's practices or prevent it from functioning as a church/school? Not on your life! The churches, house museums, gardens, and schools are the lifeblood of our community. I believe Tudor Place is such an important asset to Georgetown that its loss would be devastating. I hope, with better cooperation and understanding, neighbors and institutions can work together for the long-term success of Tudor Place for the benefit of its immediate neighbors and all of Georgetown.