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MONICA LOPOSSAY: SUN STAFF

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'Girlie' gives up her home and her bar

Canton: After tending her family's tavern for decades, a woman reluctantly sells, knowing demolition will follow.

By SCOTT CALVERT
SUN STAFF

Goodbye, Girlie.

After 85 years, Elizabeth Lula "Girlie" Hoffman is leaving her South Clinton Street house, the only home she's ever known.

That also means abandoning the spot where she ran her family's bar for decades, pouring whiskey shots and cooking up thick burgers for merchant seamen, barge operators and big-rig drivers on the industrial waterfront east of Canton.

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tury-old bastion, called Hoffman's, and put up a 17-story office tower as part of his Canton Crossing development.

Hale, chairman of 1st Mariner Bank, has promised to give Hoffman plenty of time to pack up and sell off choice artifacts, such as a floor-length spittoon trough and a 1940s-era wooden bar well worn by thousands of bent elbows. She figures she'll be out by October.

"He is a very nice man, ain't he?" Hoffman said last week, in a Baltimore accent as thick as the haze over the shipping channel.

Not that she's overjoyed to go. She has racked up a lifetime of memories in those four walls — the crazy monkey she bathed in a tub until it bit her, the men she flirted with unabashedly, the imposing mother she looked up to and had laid out in the bar after her

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A month ago, Hoffman reluctantly made a deal to sell out to businessman Edwin F. Hale for more than \$225,000, plus a monthly stipend as long as she lives. No one will say exactly how much that will be. Hale plans to tear down her cen-

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Nearly six months ago, when *The Sun* profiled Hoffman, it looked like a classic collision of old and new, with the forces [See *Girlie*, 4A]

AS 9



MONICA LOPOSSAY : SUN STAFF

"Girle" Hoffman enjoys the harbor view from her home. She has closed the family bar, on the industrial waterfront east of Canton, after operating it for decades.

Bittersweet parting of a woman, her bar

[*Girlie*, from Page 1A]

of modernity about to snuff out vestiges of a bygone era. It still is, in a way, but the dynamic has changed somewhat.

Hoffman has grown afraid to live in the house because she believes men in white suits and hardhats have been in her backyard, although there's no proof. And Hale insists he never would have tried to force out a woman who reminded him of his own 77-year-old mother in Dundalk.

"I'm glad she's happy," Hale said of Hoffman. "No bull. It was real important to me she was leaving there happy. I have a certain amount of sympathy or empathy, because she's no different than my mother."

That is a much softer tack than Hale's lawyer Stanley Fine took in January. At the time he said that if Hoffman did not agree to sell, Hale would "talk to the city about helping us to acquire the property."

Back then, Fine said, Hale hoped to build on Hoffman's lot within a year and could not put the office tower anywhere else. Now, Hale said, he has no immediate plans to build and could, in fact, have found a different site for the tower.

"At least now I have the option to build there," he said.

To Hoffman's 74-year-old sister-in-law, Marie Hoffman, the deal makes sense.

"Progress has got to go on," she said without bitterness. Better to go willingly, she said, than be forced out by "hardball" tactics such as the city condemnation scenario Fine sketched — a course that could have meant less money in the end.

Clouds of regret

Girlie Hoffman, sitting next to Marie in the now-closed bar on a hot June day, nodded in agreement. She looked forward to living with Marie in Dundalk, she said, and to being closer to her nephews Johnny and Joey and niece Sugar.

But Girlie's jovial demeanor seemed to cloud over with regret every few minutes.

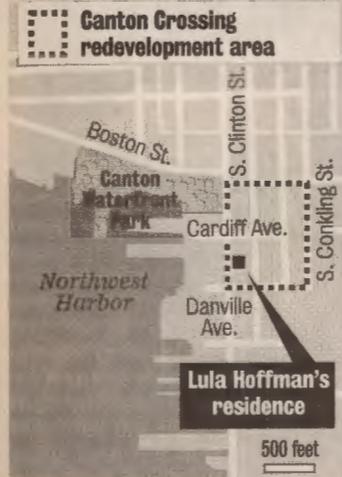
"Look at that boat going by," she said as a paddlewheel tourist boat came into view near high-end Canton apartments. "Don't it look pretty? I won't be seeing that no more."

She was born Lula, like her mother, but went by Elizabeth because she did not like the name Lula. After her father, who died in 1951, kept calling her "my little girlie," she became simply Girlie.

"Nobody don't know me by any other name," she said proudly.

The Hoffman family was large, with eight girls and three boys. The front of the house was given over to the bar, where a steady horde of working men flowed through the door for lunch or drink.

One customer, a sailor, walked in one day with a monkey he had gotten abroad and walked out without it. The family named their new pet Dinky



DENISE MURRAY : SUN STAFF

snagged food from stunned diners sitting at nearby tables.

Her bar still looks much as it did before she closed up four years ago, and it looked plenty old then. Sitting nearby is a black-and-white picture of Girlie, then about 40: she is wearing a flowery apron and standing next to a handsome man.

"This feller's off the Exxon barge. He's a nice-looking feller," she said. She smiled at the memory. "But he was married."

She studied it a minute longer. "I think I look very good in the pictures," she said, pronouncing it "pixtures."

Presided at 'pretty bar'

Hoffman, who never married, is not short on self-esteem. In the 1940s, her mother bought a new bar to replace the worn-out mahogany one. "My mother said — I hate to say it — I'm buying a pretty bar for a pretty girl," Girlie said.

As proprietor of the bar and lunch joint, mother Lula — a stern-looking matriarch who weighed 300 pounds — made homemade soup and cheeseburgers on a regular basis.

"Cheeseburgers, oh God," remembered Marie. "And Polish hot dogs, oh God."

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vestiges of a bygone era. It still is, in a way, but the dynamic has changed somewhat.

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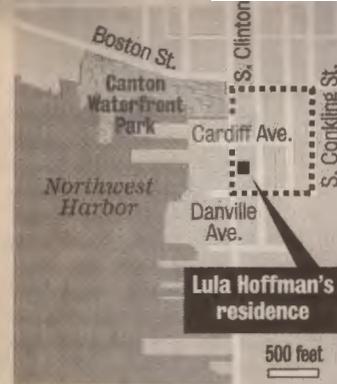
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One customer, a sailor, walked in one day with a monkey he had gotten abroad and walked out without it. The family named their new pet Dinkey, and Girlie took to tending it. The monkey liked to climb a pole out back, swinging back and forth. Sometimes it took a terrified cat along for the ride.

"I used to give him a bath in the tub out there," she recalled, pointing to the back of the building. But then the monkey bit her, sinking its teeth into her flesh.

"I said, 'I ain't washing you no more!' And when my father heard that, he said, 'We gotta get rid of that monkey.'"

So, they sold the creature to a truck driver named Crosby, who was said to have taken it to restaurants — "eatin' places," in Girlie's parlance — where it



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Girlie learned mastery of the grill from her mother and cooks to this day. The other weekend she fried rockfish that her nephew caught. She's still quite a cook — even by her own standards: "When I tasted it, I said, oh God, that's so good I gotta eat two more pieces."

Earlier this year, Hoffman cringed at the thought of moving. It didn't bother her that the area was far more desolate than before; the huge Exxon tanks that flanked Hoffman's are long gone, as are a number of nearby rowhouses. It didn't bother her that construction planned across Clinton Street would kill her view of the water and surround her with shiny new buildings.

It was home, and she had no desire to take Hale's \$225,000 offer. She liked the quiet. Even though most of her sisters are still alive, she is not close to them and so had plenty of time to herself.

But now she frets there might be people in her yard. A fan of television, she likes *Wheel of Fortune* but doesn't leave the set on all night because she worries that she won't hear trespassers.

"It's a terrible thing when you're by yourself," she said last week. "You're so lonesome."

Meanwhile, Hale said he never considered pushing the City Council to condemn her property, no matter what his lawyer said.

"There was no way I was going to ever find a way to get her thrown out of there," Hale said. "I was told I had a legal right to do it, but it was never an option because all the good will as a local bank would have gone away with one photo op of the bulldozer."

Regular payments

Anthony Palaigos, Hoffman's lawyer, said all along he hoped for a fair price, a leisurely schedule for leaving and regular payments after the sale closes next month. Hoffman and Palaigos would not say how much Hale will pay, and Hale said only that the price is between \$225,000 and \$300,000.

"It really worked out well," Palaigos said.

Girlie Hoffman recently put bouquets of brightly colored artificial flowers on the bar so no one peering through the front door would see the rows of Smirnoff Vodka bottles and mistakenly think the place was open.

Over the next few months, all that will vanish: the liquor bottles, the old phone booth, the horse figurines over the bar, the bar itself and, eventually, the building.

At least one thing will go with her to Dundalk, though: the Gunther's Beer sign. "My mother said never get rid of it."