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"Like I say, it's a lot of history in this place."

Future raps rudely at her door

Home: "Girlie" Hoffman wants to stay in the former Southeast Baltimore bar run by her family, but it's in the way of a \$100 million development plan.

By SCOTT CALVERT
SUN STAFF

By day she revisits her past. At night she dreads her future.

Lula Elizabeth "Girlie" Hoffman, 84, has always lived at 1517 S. Clinton St. She was born there. Until four years ago, the front part was Hoffman's Bar, a family-run joint for sailors and truckers wanting a drink or quick bite along Southeast Baltimore's waterfront.

She closed the bar because of a bad heart, but it remains frozen in time. It still has the card tables, the spittoon trough, the elbow-worn bar and enough Smirnoff vodka to slake the Russian army's thirst. She likes it that way: "Seemed like it was



MONICA LOPOSSAY RIESSER : SUN STAFF

Lula Elizabeth "Girlie" Hoffman is a lifelong resident of 1517 S. Clinton St., where her parents started a bar that served food and drinks to sailors and factory workers for most of the past century.

still open."

But when Hoffman shuts off the light and retreats to her back bedroom, the old comforts give way to anxiety.

"I can't sleep at night," she says, clad this day in a polka-dot dress and sparkly stud earrings.

"When I go to bed, I'm twisting and turning, thinking about it — that they're going to make me get out."

"They" are businessman Edwin F. Hale Sr. and his lawyers. Hale is developing Canton Crossing, a [See Hoffman, p. 1]

The future is closing in on home full of history

[Hoffman, from Page 1A]

\$100 million complex of offices, a hotel and housing at Boston and Clinton streets. He hopes to push the yuppie tide that has washed over Canton eastward into the industrial area Hoffman calls home.

But Hale has a problem. Girlie Hoffman's century-old, stand-alone white house is smack in the way. And she won't sell.

After negotiating back and forth and offering up to \$225,000, Hale has concluded that his only option is to ask the city to condemn her two-story house and sell the 20-by-95-foot lot to him. As his lawyer Stanley Fine puts it: "We're going to talk

to the city about helping us to acquire the property."

It's no secret Hoffman's home means a lot to her. Hale, who did not return calls for comment last week, "understands that and made a very generous and fair offer to her," Fine says.

Couldn't Canton Crossing rise up around Hoffman? No, Fine says. "It really is not a feasible way to develop the property." An office building is slated for her property.

Mayor Martin O'Malley's office says the city has no plan to take action against her. "We don't see any reason why it would happen," says spokesman Tony White. Still, White says he can't rule it out. "That's as close as I can come to infinity."

In its broad outlines, this story is a familiar one — a clash of tradition and progress, old vs. new. But to Hoffman, it is her life.

"You know what they want to do with this house? Knock it down," she says, incredulous at the thought. She cannot understand why they would want to replace it with what's "down the Inner Harbor — all them places to eat, places to sell stuff."

Hoffman is old-school Baltimore. They aren't pictures on her wall but "pixtures." It's not extra special but "extry special." And restaurants? They are "eatin' places."

Her narrow orbit has always revolved around this part of town where semis and dump



MONICA LOPOSSAY RIESSER : SUN STAFF PHOTOS

"Girle" Hoffman stands in front of the former bar. Developer Edwin F. Hale Sr. wants the site for his \$100 million Canton Crossing complex, which will include a hotel, offices and housing.

trucks shake the street every few minutes. For her, a trip might mean heading a few blocks north to Eastern Avenue for sour beef and dumplings.

It galls her that Hale wants to move her out of the way. "He's been there not even a year," she says. "He wants to take my home, me being here 84 years."

She was born April 6, 1918, to John and Lula Hoffman. It was her father who gave her the nickname, always calling her "my little girle."

Before it was Hoffman's Bar, she says, the business was Scheufel's. During World War I, the Scheufel boys went off to war and their father shut the store. That's the way Hoffman's mother found it when she walked in one day, needing a place to stay.

Scheufel rented the building to her, and she began selling snuff and soap to sailors in port. As business picked up, she put more on the shelves. But it wasn't until she married John Hoffman that they began selling beer and whiskey. Thus was Hoffman's born.

"So many memories"

They had no shortage of business. Workers teemed at factories and shipyards. Merchant seamen came and went. During Prohibition, Hoffman's served "home brew," and striking seamen in the 1930s ate free.

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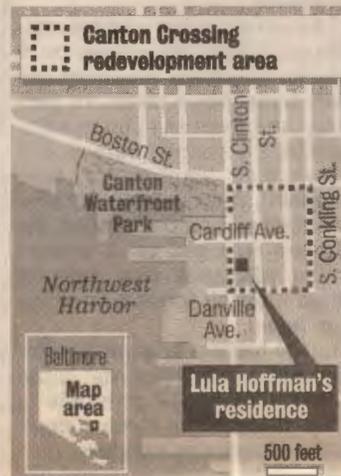
Hoffman, in her home, says, "When I go to bed, I'm twisting and turning, thinking ... that they're going to make me get out."

cash from her cigar box. She chased him outside, shooting off a gun she kept for such occasions. No one was hurt.

By the mid-1980s, almost everybody from the old neighborhood had died or moved away. Buildings were boarded up or knocked down, yet Hoffman's kept serving soups, sandwiches and booze.

Unlike nearby Canton, this was never a big neighborhood, just a few rows of rowhouses. With those mostly gone, Hoffman's only real neighbors are three cousins, the Smith sisters, who live a block away.

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"It's so many memories," she says. "I look at the bar, and I think about this one and that one." There was, for instance, the one who brought Dinkey the Monkey. The animal is said to have drunk beer from a can but got the boot when it began hitting Girlie's fingers.

Her father died in 1951, and it fell to Girlie to help her mother, whose imposing portrait still hangs over the bar. Though Girlie had 10 siblings and step-siblings, she says she was the one who stayed at Hoffman's Bar. Customers flirted with pretty Girlie, but she never married or had children.

In 1966, her mother died, leaving Girlie, then in her 40s, in charge. She seemed to get the hang of it. She tells a story about the time a man grabbed



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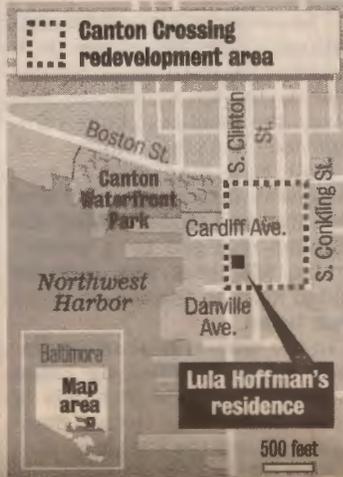
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Around the time she closed the bar, Hoffman brushed shoulders with celebrities. A scene from *Enemy of the State*, a movie starring Will Smith and Gene Hackman, was shot inside Hoffman's. They paid her \$3,000, she says. Mainly she remembers the catered meals.

"Did they have food! Oh, my God."

Four years ago, she finally shut the doors to customers. No more \$1 beers or \$1.25 bowls of noodle soup. She still makes soup for herself sometimes, and her refrigerator is stocked with eggnog. Now and then, "some feller" knocks, expecting to buy a sandwich, fooled by the sign announcing beer, liquor and lunches.

While some might get lonely,



DENISE MURRAY : SUN STAFF

Hoffman likes the quiet — she does not even notice the trucks — and the sweeping view. Out her front window she sees giant fuel tanks and shipyard cranes, but also sailboats and the downtown skyline. She has a prime seat for Fourth of July fireworks under her green awning.

"Oh," she says, "the whole thing is all lit up!"

But Canton Crossing will block that view even if she stays. A man came one day and told her that a building would go up across Clinton Street, close to the water. Even that doesn't faze her.

"I'll still see the trucks go by. Every now and then I see a truck driver I know. I'll wave my hand."

Still, she began to worry about the threat of condemnation, in which the city can force her to sell her property at fair-market value to make way for a project that will benefit the public.

So she says she came up with what she would have been willing to accept from Hale: \$1 million. Never mind that the assessed value — not always an indicator of market value — was \$47,900.

What would she do with \$1 million? "First I'd buy a brand-new car. I'd get me a chauffeur to drive me all around." She adds, with a devilish smile, "I'd like to go places."

Off the table

That would at least enable her to stop relying on her closest relatives, her sister-in-law Marie Hoffman and nephew John. Hoffman has not driven in decades.

nd But her lawyer, Anthony Palaigos, told her that her figure was way too high. She next tried \$500,000. Still too high, he told her.

Finally she dropped to \$225,000; Hale countered with \$200,000, eventually going up to \$225,000. But Hoffman has never truly wanted to sell, she says, and this month she took the offer off the table.

"That's the end off the negotiations with Miss Hoffman," says Fine, Hale's lawyer. "That's our top number, and she's rejected it."

Fine says Hale wants to start developing the block in six to 12 months. Condemnation is not the route they want to go, he says.

"That's why we have been spending two years trying to give her what I would believe would be a very generous offer considering what the property would be truly worth," says Fine.

Truly worth?

That is open to debate. "Like I say," Hoffman explains, "it's a lot of history in this place."