

Trumping Trump

In a game of real-life Monopoly, a boardinghouse owner in Atlantic City stands her ground against The Donald

At first their relations seemed friendly, flirtatious even. “Hi, millionairess,” the dapper gentleman would call as he strolled past Vera Coking sitting on the porch of her musty old boardinghouse in Atlantic City. “Hi, Donald,” she would reply.

But since the Donald in question happened to be *The Donald*—Trump, that is, the real estate and casino mogul who saw Coking’s house the way a shark sees red meat—their conflicting interests meant trouble ahead. It was nearly 18 years ago that a city development authority first tried

to buy Coking’s 25-room establishment—for which she and her late husband paid \$20,000 in 1961—in order to make way for the new Trump Plaza casino complex. Coking, who has three grown children, one at home, was offered \$251,250 for her property but refused to budge. A neighbor had pocketed a \$1.9 million jackpot for selling out to another casino owner, and Coking saw no point in selling cheap.

And Trump saw no point in waiting forever. Suddenly, in 1993, Coking—who was born in Egypt—felt as if she were living in Beirut. A noisy demolition project began on three sides of her property and red-hot chunks of metal lit small fires on her roof. Nobody was injured (“We wore hard

hats,” she says) until Coking cracked two ribs after tripping over debris piled outside her door. That accident led to a lawsuit against Trump and a \$90,000 settlement. Finally, in 1994, the city made plans to condemn her property and ordered her out.

But Coking still hasn’t moved. On July 20, after a four-year legal battle, a state judge ruled that the city was using its power improperly to benefit a single private citizen: Trump. That left one middle-aged tycoon in a funk—“The house is a pigsty,” huffed Trump—and one happy widow celebrating with her family and lawyer at a \$4.99 all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet. Says Coking of her victory over the billionaire with the boardinghouse reach: “I just want to leave something to my grandchildren.” And lucky grandchildren they’ll be. ●



Vera Coking (at her home) says Atlantic City “tried everything” to make her move.