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WOMAN'S CONDITION MAKES A RESTAURANT'S MUSIC ...LIFE THREATENING

MAYOR: MUSIC WASN'T TOO LOUD

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PASS CHRISTIAN ---

Joy Oaks never

imagined the faint sounds of a tiny boombox could kill her.

But when she hears music played at nearby Kimball's Seafood on Wednesday nights, her body sometimes breaks into violent convulsions and her eyes roll to the back of her head. And when the seizure ends, she stops breathing.

If she's not treated within minutes, the 43-year-old could die.

Oaks doesn't know exactly what medical condition she has, but a University of Mississippi professor said she likely suffers from musicogenic epilepsy --- a disease so rare no medical records exist about how many people in the world have it.

Dr. Mech Sundaram, professor of neurology at the school's medical center, said only one of his 1,300 patients has the disorder. Certain music, certain tones, certain frequencies will precipitate or induce a seizure, he said.

Oaks' fiance, Joe Kepfer, a detective in Bay St. Louis, filed a disturbing-the-peace charge against Darlene Kimball, owner of the restaurant and seafood market that has been a staple on the Coast since 1930. A warrant for her arrest was then issued.

Kepfer said paramedics have responded to his FEMA trailer on Market Street, about 1,500 feet from Kimball's, at least five times because of the seizures. He declined to say if Oaks was being treated for her condition.

In court in December, Kepfer's attorney, **Wayne Woodall**, agreed to withdraw the complaint as long as Kimball keeps the music down, something the restaurant is trying to do.

Every Wednesday the business sells plates of boiled shrimp out of an unfinished cabana to help raise money to rebuild. Hurricane Katrina wiped away the business, along with trees and other nearby buildings that would have helped drown out the country tunes coming from the Sony boombox.

"I'll hear the music," Oaks said, "and the next thing I'll know is, I'll wake up and see paramedics and firemen in my face." She added music at her church has also triggered an episode.

A few years ago, Oaks fell at her security job and hit her head on concrete. She suffered her first seizure six months later.

The part of the brain that censors music --- the temporal lobe --- becomes unstable, causing the "network" to go haywire, Sundaram said. "Certain sounds end up being perceived in an abnormal fashion and people react in an abnormal way."

The doctor's antidote: Avoid listening to music.

Mayor Chipper McDermott said he was sympathetic to Oaks' medical condition and the city is updating its current noise ordinances.

But he said he was at Kimball's one of the Wednesdays when Oaks said she had a seizure and didn't think the music was too loud.

"Kimball's has been there for 70 years," he said. "It's just the place for everyone to be hanging out."

At a recent shrimp boil the only music heard inside the cabana was brief, and from a small television hanging from the wall. It was the theme song to "Wheel of Fortune."

The sounds of kids playing a hand-slap game dominated the open room.

The boombox sat alone in the corner; it wasn't turned on.

"The music's never been too loud," said Pass resident Scott Ebrite, sitting with friends at an octagon table, shrimp peelings and Dos Equis beers strewn about. "You can't inhibit all downtown redevelopment just because of one woman, especially since it's zoned commercial. They need to relocate."

Oaks, though, has no intention of moving. She was Christmas shopping on a recent Wednesday when Kimball's opened its doors for the shrimp boil.

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Darlene Kimball visits with Ralph Zuleeg of Pass Christian at Kimball's restaurant on East Second Street in Pass Christian.

-- Darlene Kimball hopes to be able to turn a boombox back on at her restaurant on East Second Street in Pass Christian.