

SCRATCHPAD

Mary Todd's passes from one personal storyteller to another

By **ERICK BENDEL**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

When I learned last week that Mary Todd, owner of Mary Todd's Workers Bar & Grill, had agreed to sell the tavern to Astoria author Diana Kirk, my reaction was something like: "No way!" followed by, "That's perfect."

I couldn't put my finger on why Kirk seemed a fitting suitor. Then I recalled my first meeting with Todd two years ago.

I interviewed her primarily to commemorate the 25th anniversary of her establishment (a pillar pub with killer grub) but was curious about something else: Todd is well-known in the local drug-and-alcohol rehabilitation community. I decided to save that potentially touchy topic for the end of our chat; if it didn't go well, I'd at least have enough material to write about the silver jubilee.



Before I could ask a single substantive question, however, she began opening up about her struggle with alcohol dependency, apparently eager to tell her story.

Todd was remarkably forthright, offering gritty personal details that many people would hesitate to reveal to anyone, especially a reporter. It's a story she shares with people facing addiction to let them know that if she can survive it, so

can they.

I left with a unique respect for her; I doubt I would have been so courageously candid.

What does this have to do with Kirk? Well, are you familiar with her 2016 collection of personal essays, "Licking Flames: Tales of a Half-Assed Hussey"?

Kirk read selections from her book at a KALA event I attended a while back. Some of her stories — describing sex, intimacy and bodily fluids — are so boldly revealing that an


irrationally prudish part of me wanted to ask, "Are you sure you want to say that in public?" in the same way I recall asking Todd: Are you sure you want this on the record?

My impression of these women is that they are disarmingly authentic. And both, in their own way, have made their private journeys gifts to the world. It is reassuring to know that ownership of the workers tavern will pass from one honest storyteller to another.

And, as any Mary Todd's

regular will tell you, the tavern itself has an honest vibe. It is a gloriously unpretentious space where you want to be yourself. A deep history of customer satisfaction is evident everywhere, down to the names of patrons and couples etched into the lacquered wooden bar.

The place invites self-disclosure, as though a metered dose of aerosol truth serum has been released into the atmosphere.

Then again, that may just be the yuccas. 

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