

By **WILLIAM HAM**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

The recently-published anthology “Nasty!,” released through Portland’s King Shot Press, is very much a book of its cultural moment. Its 19 essays, all written by women, are bold, raw and defiant — a perfect encapsulation of the zeitgeist, where #MeToo is the hashtag of choice and Stormy Daniels an unlikely feminist icon.

It’s appropriate, then — insofar as anything about the book can be considered “appropriate” — that one of those essays comes from the pen of Astoria’s Diana Kirk.

Kirk, a career real estate investor and owner of Workers Tavern in Astoria’s Uniontown since last November, spends what remains of her spare time plying her sideline as a comic essayist. Her first collection, “Licking Flames: Tales of a Half-Assed Hussy,” was released in 2016. A second volume, a compendium of travel tales provisionally titled “Onward Ho,” is in the works.

If you haven’t read her work, suffice it to say that it’s definitely not for the faint of heart or the clutcher of pearls. Kirk’s writing is brazen, bawdy and unapologetic. Which, as it happens, made her a perfect fit for this project.

“‘Nasty!’ is not really a political book, though the title makes it seem that way,” Kirk said. “It’s more about being a woman in this day and age and all the (nonsense) that we’ve had to put up with. It’s really about all aspects of womanhood. A lot of the writing is pretty fierce, and some of it is pretty funny.”

Which is not to say that it can’t be both, as you might infer from the title of Kirk’s contribution: “Tampon Trigger.”

“My piece came about because of a post I wrote on Facebook about how Washington state was going to start taxing menstrual products, and I was like, ‘We already pay too much for haircuts and shoes. Why can’t we get this one little break?’ And this guy responded with, ‘Oh, I’m so glad I don’t have to listen to my ex-wife talk about these things anymore.’ Instead of saying ‘screw you’ like one does on Facebook, I decided to share with him all the details his wife probably never told him, as if to say, ‘Oh, this grosses you out? Well, here’s my life, you big jerk.’ And it turned out really funny.”

‘Too sexual’

Funny as it was, Kirk’s essay took a



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTOS

Diana Kirk pours a drink at Workers Tavern, which she took over as the new owner last year.



while to find a home.

“It was rejected by seven different publications, which was interesting,” Kirk said. “Not just that it was rejected — every writer gets rejected a million times, that’s just part of the business — but that, in every case, it was rejected for being ‘too sexual.’”

“But if you read it, you’ll see that it’s not sexual at all! It’s about menstruation! Which goes to show you that no

matter how hard a woman tries, that’s the slot she gets put into. So it became kind of a badge of honor to get rejected on those terms.”

“Tampon Trigger,” like much of Kirk’s writing, serves as a riposte to the preconceptions and prejudices faced by women in a traditionally male-dominated society, something she knows all too well via her day job.

“As a real estate investor, I work

with all men,” Kirk said. “From CPAs to lawyers to financiers to contractors, there are no women in my business apart from the realtors who sell my houses when I fix them up. And I find that my natural sassiness works to my benefit about 70 percent of the time. A lot of the men find it hilarious and refreshing.

“Then there are those who just can’t handle it, and I can usually pick them out within a minute of meeting them. It’s very often the guys who control the money who give me the hardest time. There’s an energy there I just don’t give with. It’s the hardest part of my job, going to the fifth floor of these buildings and trying to negotiate with these guys with all the trophies in their offices and their manicures and their striped socks — it drives me a little bit crazy.”

Comedians are truth-tellers

The ability to channel that craziness into laugh-out-loud prose is a quality Kirk shares with her chief creative influences.

“I can’t read serious feminist literature very much, it’s just too exhausting. I gravitate more towards humor writers. I love it when people say my essays remind them of David Sedaris; he’s so rad. But I mostly get compared to comedians, especially when I do my readings. Amy Schumer comes up a lot, and I love everything that comes out of Chelsea Handler’s mouth; she’s just a goddess to me.

“I think that stand-up comedians are the smartest of all entertainers, because they can sell you something that you know is so horrible and make you laugh at your own hypocrisy. They can bring our deepest, darkest secrets to our faces. They’re truth-tellers.”

Such truth telling has proven resonant. Since its publication in January, “Nasty!” is already the fastest-selling title in King Shot Press’ catalogue, the profits for which are being donated to Planned Parenthood, and a sequel is already in the works. You can find it at bookstores or online, or you can just stop by Workers Tavern, where both it and “Licking Flames” are on prominent display next to the bar.

“I’ve done a lot of work on this place, but I don’t want it to lose its rough-and-ready atmosphere,” Kirk said, contemplating the display case. “Maybe we should get a couple of those fake bullet-hole stickers for the glass.” 