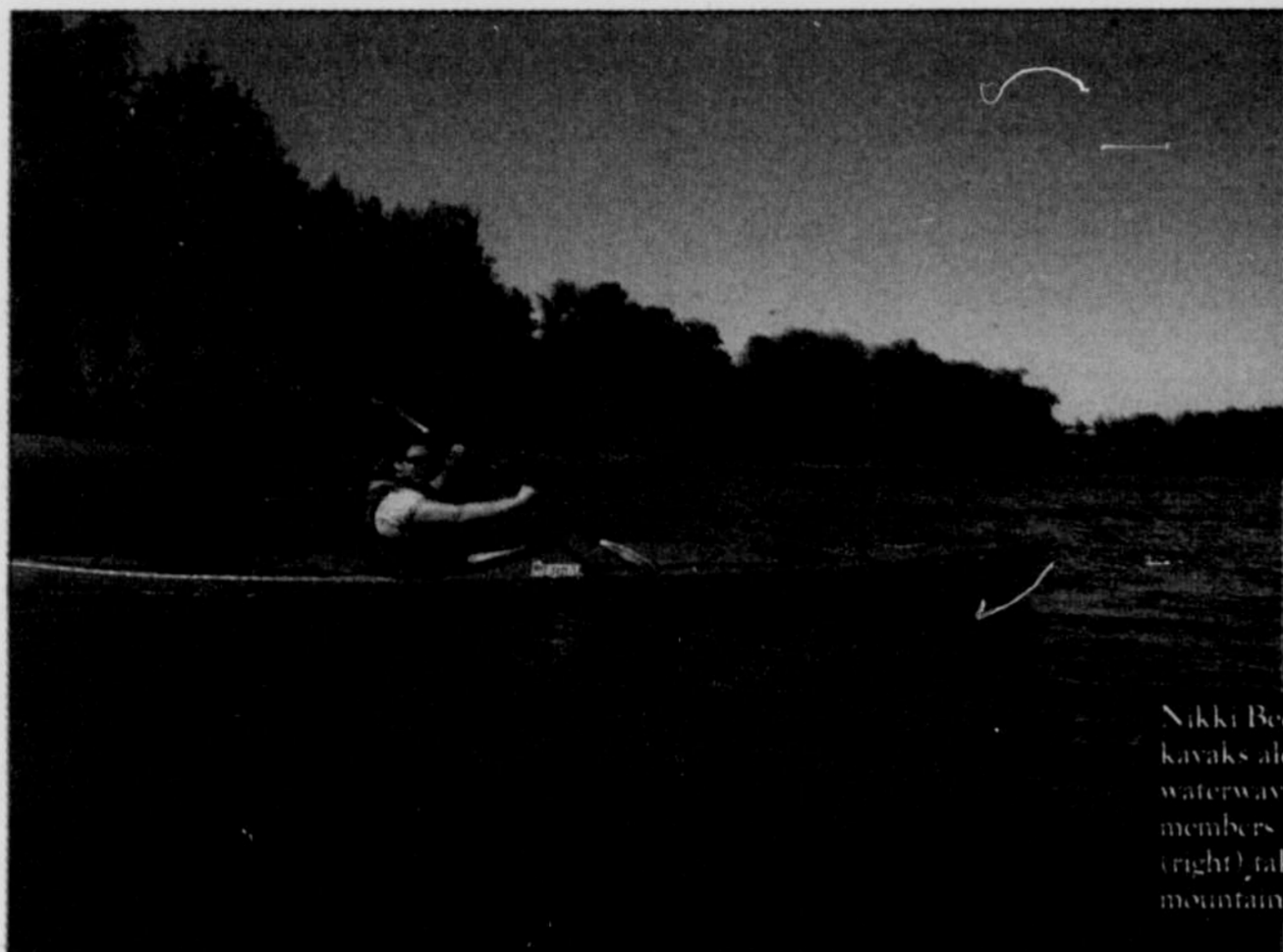


**CULTURE**



Nikki Becker (left) kayaks along local waterways while members of Miss Fit (right) take to the mountains.

**R**unning from meeting to interview, Nikki Becker of Miss Fit Adventures meets with me just hours before leaving to lead a group of women on a hike into the Grand Canyon.

"I never planned on having an office," Becker says, gesturing around the space in Portland's East Bank warehouse district, which is filled with bright colored yoga balls, exercise equipment and photographs of women smiling from mountain peaks or amid white water. "It's a good place for women to come to meet each other, to get to know each other, before we embark upon an adventure together."

Miss Fit is a program that encompasses outdoor recreation and physical and nutritional training while building a spirit of support and camaraderie among participants. Whether hiking, snowshoeing, cycling or mountain climbing, Becker's vision is simple—encourage women to take control of their health.

In between mapping routes, booking accommodations, planning menus and preparing food, the Portland lesbian readies women of all ages and fitness levels for adventure. "I want this to be a life-changing experience for women," she asserts.

*"I've worked with women who've had a deathly fear of water or heights... It's the most amazing feeling to see those same women kayaking or climbing a mountain and loving it."*

—Nikki Becker

Miss Fit aims for results that reach far beyond the cut of this summer's bathing suit. The programs address self-confidence, emotional well-being and the idea that good health habits affect all aspects of a woman's life.

"It's not strictly about getting into shape," Becker explains. "A lot of women come to me with fears and anxieties, others with goals that they have always wanted to attain. I've worked with women who've had a deathly fear of water or heights who want to work toward conquering those fears. It's the most amazing feeling to see those same women kayaking or climbing a mountain and loving it."

A top-ranked javelin thrower and onetime Olympic hopeful, Becker spent eight years of her life in intense training. She left the competitive lifestyle in 1998 after

sustaining a shoulder injury and began to focus her energy on helping others.

Directing her knowledge and compassion toward assisting women in reaching their goals seemed to be the next obvious step. "I love working with people. I got to the point in my own training where I was finished beating my body up; I wanted to take my work and move on to a different place."

**N**ow a National Academy of Health and Fitness trainer, Becker works with women individually, assessing their physical and dietary needs. She creates a strategy for training and nutritional counseling that is specific to their situation.

When you join Miss Fit, you're a member for life—working toward becoming more physically fit or overcoming major lifelong fears is no small task. Becker understands this and is both contact and confidante; she uses her degree in psychology to be a better ally. "I want to be available 24/7," she notes. "It's important to be there not just physically but emotionally."

However, she and her partner, Tina, agree that the most important aspect is the group dynamic forged through Miss Fit. Everyone

stays together as a team, and there are no airs of competition. The point of the program is to support, not try to outdo each other.

"We eliminate the idea of competition," Becker emphasizes. "Whether on a hike or a bike ride, we make an effort to take time to enjoy what we're doing and enjoy each other."

Miss Fit's clients range in age from women in their early 30s to mid-60s. The eldest client is 91.

An Oregon native, Becker stresses the importance of being physically active as adults in order to inspire good habits in our children. "I grew up near the coast and at a young age had a love for nature and being physically active. I had rivers, woods, the ocean—all right there when I was growing up. It's difficult to see so many kids today suffering from poor health, poor diet and obesity."

She puts health and fitness into perspective, looking not at the immediate gratification that comes with fad diets or get-thin-quick schemes, but at the larger picture.

"Once we, as women, decide to break a cycle of the kind of unhealthy lifestyles this culture promotes, we become positive role models for the next generation. It's important that we recognize this and work on not only positively affecting ourselves, but also seeing how it affects others—how it affects every aspect of our lives." □

Call MISS FIT ADVENTURES at 503-957-3287 or visit [www.missfitadventures.com](http://www.missfitadventures.com).

JODI DARBY is a Portland writer, graphic artist and radio producer.

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