

'Wild, Wild Woman' tells how to enjoy the great outdoors

By KATHY PARRISH

Wearing a handwoven blouse over slacks and boots, tousle-haired Maggie Nichols looks her role as assistant managing editor of Field and Stream magazine.

Then you find out she usually wears skirts to the office, puts on lipstick before her picture is taken and parties until all hours with her producer-husband.

You can't tell by looking — which is the point of Nichols's book, "Wild, Wild Woman," a woman's guide to enjoying the outdoors.

"A lot of women feel they don't belong in the outdoors, that it's a man's world," said Ms. Nichols. In 18 years with "America's Number One Sportsman's Magazine," she has become an experienced outdoor person.

"They think it's too rough — all worms and yuck."

"That's just not the case at all. If I can do it, anyone can."

Speaking to writers attending the Craftsmanship of Creative Writing Conference Oct. 27 at Oakland University, Ms. Nichols called "Wild, Wild Woman" a "why-to book."

"THERE'S HARDLY any need for another how-to book," said the 48-year-old Greenwich Village resident.

"So I tried to make it readable as well as inspire them with the joys of the outdoors."

Written in the humorous way she speaks, "Wild, Wild Woman" gives information about sports ranging from backpacking and shooting to snowshoeing. Ms. Nichols tells where to go, what to wear and carry with you. She even touches on outdoor "Facts of Life" like skin care and going to the bathroom in the wilds.

"I talk about things most books don't talk about because they're written by men," said the author. She believes many people — men and women alike

— forego adventure because they fear dirt, discomfort or being laughed at when they don't know what to do.

She is a native of Winnetka, Ill., admittedly "not quite your great outdoors." But she enjoyed the outdoors as a child, especially time spent at summer camp in Wisconsin.

After graduating from Antioch College and doing master's work at the University of New Mexico, she headed for New York and landed a job with Quick Frozen Foods magazine.

"I KNEW less about that than I did about the outdoors," she said. She got the Field and Stream job, which had been open for three months, after persuading an employment agency to send her there.

The editor liked my background and felt I would fit right in," said Ms. Nichols, who found she did. "I've always felt that job was just waiting for me."

Once at Field and Stream, she became more and more interested in the outdoors and sports.

"It's like autobiography," she told the writers. "You must have lived it."

Despite some problems — like a run in with a black bear which she was relieved to find wasn't the "maniac of the mountains" — she loves her work.

"It's very rewarding and I have a wonderful time," said Ms. Nichols, who recently returned from a fishing trip in Guatemala.

"I LIKE the exotic places I go to during the week because I do laundry on the weekends."

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Her book grew out of a Field and Stream column called "Especially for Women." She wrote for three years before it was eliminated in a cutback.

"It was expendable because the magazine really is for everyone," the editor said.

But she believed there was more to be said on the subject.

"I had gathered such a lot of experience, and it seemed important to share it. One reason I wrote the book was to tell people about my hilarious experiences."

She also wanted to share her enthusiasm for the outdoors.

"Just taking a walk in a city park is such a wonderful release, to get away from the mall for awhile," she said. And she hopes the book will help women, who she thinks are "brought up taught to be helpless," develop self-reliance.

"It makes them understand they can survive if they have to. People who own Coleman stoves and down sleeping bags will do okay."

If those reasons don't fit, the \$4.95 paperback is easy to carry outdoors.

"At least you can be entertained while waiting to be found," she said.



MAGGIE NICHOLS

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