

MODERN WOMAN

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this. These are girls who've said, 'I want to be a warrior.'"

Several of the female warriors-in-training will climb Mt. Kilimanjaro with Mindy in early 2014. The climb will involve other women from around the world and benefit the FEED Foundation, a hunger-relief organization.

Mindy's goal is to create an annual "Warrior Challenge" like this

A Maasai woman encouraged Mindy to complete the training, explaining that women had wanted to be warriors for generations.

for women and girls in hopes of supporting efforts for global empowerment and education.

She also plans to support the Maasai women through fundraising and awareness.

A quarter of the proceeds from her book will go to the Africa Schools of Kenya (ASK), which has programs committed to female empowerment and education. In addition, for every book sold, the FEED Foundation will provide a school lunch.

After graduating from business school in 2012, Mindy is now working on a second book. Beyond that, she's not certain what the future has in store—and it doesn't worry her one bit.

"I'm at a point in my career where I'm going to take another risk," she says. "I'm not sure what it is yet, but I'm 100 percent sure it's something my gut will tell me to do." ●

IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON WITMER

FOLLOWING A DREAM

often takes a healthy dose of courage—and a giant leap of faith. Like Mindy Budgor, these three women have done the daring, all while breaking down barriers and rattling glass ceilings in fields typically run by the boys. They have a secret to share:

You can do it, too!

SHAKING
UP THE
WORLD OF
SUSHI

NIKI
NAKAYAMA

"I realized at some point that I don't need to think like a man in order to produce things that men produce. I just need to go my own way and stay focused."



AT FIRST GLANCE, it may seem as if Niki Nakayama was born to be a sushi chef. Her parents own a fish-distribution company in California, and she grew up surrounded by seafood of all kinds.

But it was only later, in culinary school, that something clicked: Japanese cuisine suddenly made sense to her and, she realized, fit her personality.

"Growing up, I thought to myself that I would never sell fish for a living," Niki says, "but I'm still peddling fish—just at a different level."

At her Los Angeles restaurant, n/naka, which opened in 2011, Niki focuses exclusively on *kaiseki*, a traditional Japanese multi-course dining experience. She says that hers is the only restaurant in L.A. fully dedicated to *kaiseki*—which requires a rare type of restaurant and a rare type of chef.

She has faced challenges. Sushi chefs are overwhelmingly male, and Japanese culture bolsters this man's world. At Niki's previous restaurant—a sushi bar—a Japanese businessman saw her behind the bar and promptly walked out. At n/naka, Niki decided against having an open kitchen where diners could see her cooking to avoid a repeat experience.

"It's better that the guests just focus on the food versus who's making the food," she says. "With Japanese food, it's so easy to have an idea of what your chef should look like."

But, for her, every obstacle has led to a new opportunity or a creative solution. She has learned to follow her intuition, in cooking and in life.

"When you do something for so long," she says, "instincts take over and there's a natural trust in what we're doing and in myself. That's very gratifying."

TO DO
Believe anything
is possible and let
go of weaknesses.

