

SKIING WHILE FAT

BY ALI WINES, she/her | @ali_wines

Kerry Godbout was 12 when her mother pulled her out of a crevasse. Growing up in the Canadian Rockies as the daughter of a career ski patroller meant that family vacations looked a little different from what her city peers experienced. “While other kids went to Disneyland, we went to Alaska,” she said.

Life in the mountains led to Godbout becoming an accomplished skier, climber, and all-around mountain woman, before pursuing competitive speed skating as a teenager.

As an athlete with Olympic ambitions, she had the support and coaching that you would expect: intensive training sessions, hours in the gym, and expert health and nutritional coaching, including a strict keto diet that helped her stay strong.

It was when the competition stopped that the problems began.

After retiring in her twenties, Godbout began to gain weight at an astonishing rate. “I was 135 pounds at my racing weight, and 18 percent body fat,” she said. By the time she had her second child, she was 280 pounds, with over 40 percent body fat. Her blood pressure was off the charts. “They told me I was going to have a stroke if nothing changed.”

After years of begging doctors to treat her weight gain as not a lifestyle issue but

a medical one, Godbout was finally diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, a sometimes painful disease affecting fertility and the endocrine system, which often causes rapid weight gain. This diagnosis was validating, but only the beginning of her journey.

With a frequently absent husband and a non-verbal child with Down’s Syndrome, Godbout knew she urgently needed to maintain her health. “If I’d had a heart attack or a stroke at that time, there was no one else. My children would have died alongside me.”

She returned to a strict keto diet and slowly shed weight. She began to look forward to being able to ski again. As any skier will attest, skiing isn’t simply a sport; it’s a community and a way of life, which Godbout’s size had excluded her from.

Godbout found she had sized out of women’s ranges, leaving her with no options but ill-fitting menswear and shell pants that left her exposed to brutal Alberta temperatures. Poor quality gear was coupled with disbelief from retailers about her expert skill level.

Well-fitting gear isn’t just a matter of fashion. As Kerry points out, “When ski clothes don’t fit properly, you can’t bend to get into the proper stance to control your speed, so it becomes a safety issue.”



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want to start skiing again, they feel inadequate and unwelcome—it comes as a shock.”

With the average American woman now wearing a size 16 to 18, some outdoor brands are responding to consumer demand, including Columbia and Obermeyer, which produce ski-wear up to size 22/3X. Balon recalls years at trade shows, advocating for a different approach. “In the early days it was tough—I’d be sitting in the car on calls, trying to shush my kids in the back seat. But because of my history in the industry, suppliers were willing to listen. Skiers in larger bodies want sports performance, not a shit-quality Walmart jacket.”

And that’s what Godbout has been searching for. “I’m a proper outdoorswoman,” she said. “I know how to tie a bowline and read an altimeter. Fat people should be allowed to have functional pockets and good zippers.”

While managing her condition will be a life-long effort, she is optimistic about the future. Now a thriving single mom and professional bike mechanic, she is centered in the outdoor community she has always belonged to. “I will never be skinny. But I like the body I’m in right now and the things it’s capable of doing.”

Godbout’s story is not a surprise to Monica Balon, owner of PlusSnow, which sells technical ski-wear up to size 30 for women and 10XL for men. “There’s a massive misconception that plus-size people are not active enough. People’s bodies change all the time, but when they