

"Sticks and Wheels Rule" - Coast Reporter

By Jan DeGrass/Arts and Entertainment Writer, Coast Reporter, April 31, 2006.

This is a book whose time has come.

Sticks and Wheels is a guide to accessible travel on the Sunshine Coast researched and written by mobility challenged author Ellen Frank of Gibsons. This handy guide is designed to help those who get around using crutches, cane, scooter, walker or wheelchair. It covers Coast restaurants, parks, malls, even places to pee — washrooms in which the disabled will be assured of grab bars and a large stall. Frank has lived with multiple sclerosis since 1988 and is determined to remain active in the community. As the author points out, we in B.C. are on a trajectory for the 2010 Olympics and right after that, the Paralympics, games for disabled athletes. The message is loud and clear to businesses and governments: let the people wheel. Let's have some pride in the Coast by making accessibility changes as soon as possible. A former travel agent, Frank imbues the book with much recreational tourist talk. Visitors can learn the best accessible place to camp (Porpoise Bay Park) and the best place to order warm spinach calamari salad (Trios).

As with any directory, some of the entries are out of date immediately, although the book appeared in print less than a month ago. For example, a tiny place, an East Indian restaurant in Sechelt with great food, that Frank describes as having limited accessibility, has recently moved to a new, more convenient location in Trail Bay Mall.

You, the reader, can contribute to this book by keeping the author posted on such changes and giving suggestions for what should be covered in the next book by emailing her through her website at www.sticksandwheels.net.

She's already looking towards the revised Sticks and Wheels 2007. The next edition will likely include more information about Coast bed and breakfast accommodation. Since we have no major hotels here, the B&Bs have taken up much of the market niche for luxury tourism, but many of them are built on hills to capture magnificent views — terrain that is limiting for anyone with challenges.

Readers who have never considered such limitations before will catch a glimpse of what life is like for the mobility challenged. In a section on dining, Frank writes that it's not only a question of finding a restaurant with a level parking spot big enough to unload a scooter or wheelchair, but it's also a concern as to whether she can enter a restaurant without saying "excuse me" 15 times while working her way to a table.

Then there's the issue of the accessible washroom. After all these considerations have been dealt with, only then can she decide whether the food is worth the effort.

If there's anything I would like to see added to this book it would be more background in disabled living. How big and how heavy are those scooters? How low must fixtures be for the wheelchair disabled to reach them? And what the heck is a kneeling bus, anyway?

Many of these issues will be totally new to the average reader, but as Frank points out, the vast majority of baby boomers are heading towards old age when answers to these questions will become of paramount importance.

Sticks and Wheels is available at many Coast outlets for \$9.95.

