

## Westcoaster Review

BOOK REVIEW, Week of May 4, 2006, by Jenn Sommersby Young

Ellen Frank gets around. And she wants others to follow her lead.

The Gibsons mother, grandmother, writer, activist, and retired travel agent doesn't let a motor, four wheels, and seat vinyl keep her from taking on the glorious surroundings of the Sunshine Coast. Diagnosed with MS nearly 20 years ago, Frank's go-get-'em attitude is palpable in the words of her book. There's no such word as 'immobile' in Frank's repertoire: so what's your excuse, O Able-Bodied One?

Sticks and Wheels is an ambitious, 120-page guidebook to the Lower Sunshine Coast, 'designed for people whose mobility is compromised in one way or another, from slow walkers to full-time wheelchair users.' The author does an excellent job compiling those tiny little details that we wish we could find in a crystal ball—does the restaurant have a ramp? How big are the bathrooms on the ferries? Where do we park for best accessibility into the building? Frank's guide includes phone numbers, addresses, maps, even a detailed legend system to help the reader determine where they will find the best options for their particular mobility challenges.

I was so excited when I got hold of this book, I emailed my mom in California to tell her about Frank's great idea, and to say, 'Don't you wish we had this sort of thing when Michelle was younger!' My oldest sister Michelle was born with cerebral palsy. While we were growing up, finding restaurants and other public venues that offered accessible entrances and seating areas for wheelchair-bound patrons was very, very difficult. I can still see my fiery, Irish-blooded mom standing in front of an entire café of diners, verbally duking it out with the manager because we couldn't get Michelle's power drive into the front door without first hiring an excavation crew. You go, Mom.

The coolest thing about this book, though, is its universal applicability. Beyond individuals who rely on canes, wheelchairs, and scooters to get about, Frank is also targeting another audience who rely on wheels: PARENTS! Lack of stroller accessibility or teeny-tiny bathroom stalls can be a total nightmare when you find yourself dealing with a poopy baby or a sand-covered 4-year-old who needs to use the potty.

Frank's book is a pleasant read, highly informative, and very detailed. She includes a comprehensive list of all of the area's recreational offerings, from restaurants to B&Bs, local arts, culture and heritage, parks, and shopping (!). She plugs in funny-isms now and again: 'Reality check: Many 'Baby Boomers' are now seniors! How time flies when we're having fun!', reminding the reader that yes, accessibility is a serious issue, but shouldn't we enjoy the beauty at our fingertips in this glorious part of the world? How LUCKY are we?

Frank also doesn't mince words in her descriptions of various local venues. My favorite chapter title, "The Best and Worst Toilets of the Sunshine Coast," covers exactly what it promises: toilets. In describing the all-time loser for bathroom accessibility (Gilligan's Pub in Sechelt), Frank writes "You struggle your way past one [door] and then right away there is another one. Way too much opportunity to pee your pants." Looks like the Skipper should hire a contractor.

The book's website, [www.sticksandwheels.net](http://www.sticksandwheels.net), seems to be in a construction holding pattern. The "Reads and Resources" section at the back of the book lists their related site as a spot to stop for travel planning help, but it's not quite there yet. I'd recommend that you check back now and again to see if anything's progressed.

Beyond planning for accessible adventure on the Sunshine Coast, this guide serves as a good reference for anyone looking to take in any number of annual events and festivals, including the Gibsons and Pender Harbor jazz festivals, Sea Cavalcade, Sunshine Coast Drag Races, and the Wood Duck Wilderness Festival.

Frank's guidebook is a handy, unassuming, coil-bound companion to creating your best day on the Sunshine Coast—and it'll keep your focus on the fun and not on the size of the bathroom stalls.

Available through [www.sticksandwheels.net](http://www.sticksandwheels.net) (email [info@sticksandwheels.net](mailto:info@sticksandwheels.net).)

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