

Guest Blog by Sharon Irvine, one of our intrepid travelers
(and also a wild women although she does not admit it!)

Traveling With the Wild Women

A friend once told me we needed to make memories to cherish and laugh about when we reached our "rocking chair" days. A recent handicapped accessible tour with Deb Kerper from Cruise Planners is firmly and happily positioned in my memory banks.

Being an able-bodied person in a group using scooters and wheel chairs was both enlightening and sometimes challenging. We took on the streets and sidewalks of Manhattan, going to Broadway musicals and restaurants. We went up steep slopes and across busy streets. We saw the best parts of Boston and Portland. We traveled to water that changed direction and visited the graves of people who had been on the Titanic. We traveled through the beauty of Acadia National Park, the Bay of Fundy, Bar Harbor, and the gardens in Halifax. Being disabled or not was never much of an issue.

Deb had set up private tours which were not only nicer than a big bus but also helped solidify the growing friendships that were evolving. The smaller group size allowed us to laugh together at ourselves, each other and life. It also promoted mingling in twos and threes but all getting together for dinner each night.

Sometimes I was on outsider, not by intent, but by my inability to share the experience of the conversational topic. However, these conversations made me privy to knowledge I didn't have and could not have otherwise learned. I had no way of understanding their unique difficulties any more than they could understand how much my legs ached when we had to wait in long lines or travel up very long, steep gangplanks. Our comradeship was influenced very little by our differences because we could all cooperate and laugh at the foibles of the human condition.

There were perks on both sides. For me, getting on planes or being seated in theaters and restaurants was much better than if we had all been able-bodied. Moving through throngs of people was made easier by Deb and her scooter with a horn. At times when a tall person was needed to get something faster, or when a heavy door needed to be held open it made more sense for me to take care of it. I could also hold items in both hands and move through crowds. (This worked well for things like ice cream cones and hot coffee,) What a great system!

Most people around us were quite accommodating to the wheelchairs and scooters and to me - but only if it was clear that I was a member of the group. That made me think about folks who had disabilities but were not using visible adaptive devices. How do they manage when no one is even aware they have needs? We, both disabled and able-bodied, could certainly be more aware of the space around us. We need to pay more attention to where our focus is and to expand the perimeters to include those nearby. The tunnel vision so often created by our lifestyles can shut out the possibilities that exist. What a shame to waste them.....

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