

## River of the Stick Wavers

**Gillian Andrews**

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*River of the Stick Wavers is an empowering and appealing story about one woman's transformation.*

*River of the Stick Wavers* is the thoughtful story of one woman's journey to self-discovery—a book that examines gender roles, racism, and spirituality.

The story is set in the summer of 1963, in a small Canadian community along the French River. Grace is newly widowed, and is trying to figure out what to do with the rest of her life. She has always had someone to take care of her, so her identity was that of a wife and mother, but her children are grown and her husband is gone.

Grace books four months in a cabin, a comforting place from her childhood, and settles in for a summer of rest and reflection. She makes new friends, including an Ojibwe woman, Mary; an older couple, Albert and Maggie; and the local librarian, George. These characters are generally interesting and well-rounded.

Mary is raising two sons on her own. She is strong and spiritual, running the local diner and standing up for her family whenever and however she can. Maggie is an artist with no time for or interest in domestic chores, and Albert takes care of her so that she can pursue her art. George shares Grace's passion for history, and while his wife is away helping to care for their new grandchild, he is a bit confused about how to take care of himself.

As Grace works to rediscover herself, these new friends introduce her to new ideas and beliefs, and help her to understand that she does not need to fit a prescribed role. Grace's self-awareness grows, and, though still mourning the loss of her husband, she begins to embrace the idea of living life on her own terms.

The writing is generally clear, and the plot moves at a reasonable pace. The story is one of introspection, and though there is not a lot of excitement, it is engaging and easy to read. There is a great deal of description throughout. At times, it is evocative: "She added two teaspoons of sugar and a dollop of milk to her cup and stirred up memories along with her coffee." However, other descriptions are far more complicated than is necessary, and can actually distract from the story. Though dialogue is occasionally stiff, the characters generally interact in a very natural way, sharing their lives and their stories as they try to help one another.

The book is both hopeful and entertaining. The small community and its inhabitants are familiar and welcoming, and Grace, as an ordinary woman whose foundation is shaken, is easy to relate to. The realizations she makes about her own strengths and abilities will appeal to many.

Anyone who has ever felt like they are going through the motions of life will find some truth in *River of the Stick Wavers*, an empowering story of one woman's transformation.

CATHERINE THURESON (December 30, 2016)

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