

It's Where You Go, It's What You Do



BEYOND LIMITS

AWAKENYOURPOTENTIAL

“Nothing is stronger than the Human Spirit.”

The story of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken your Potential

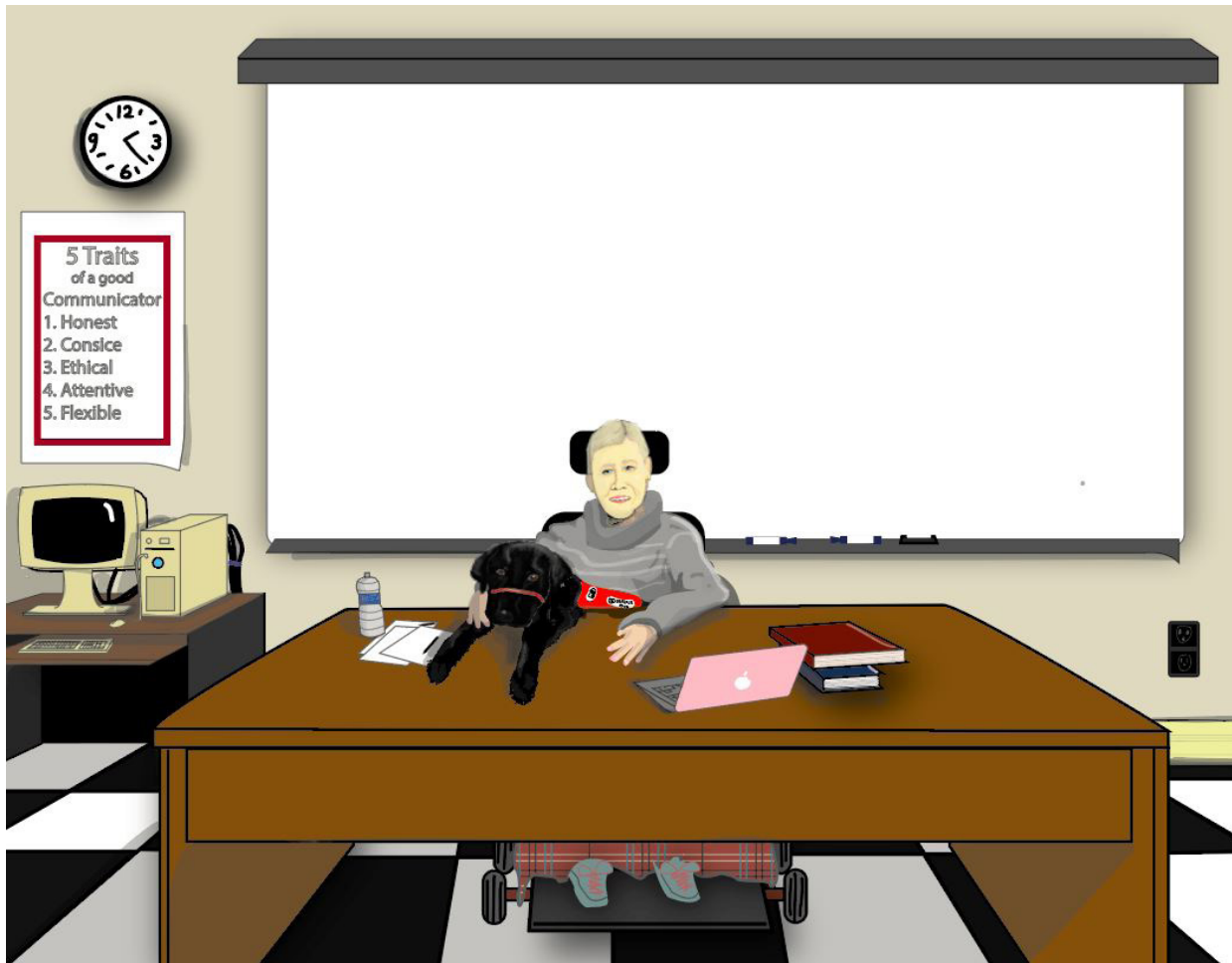
Written and Illustrated by Jacquelyn Lowman and Justin Ouellette

Foreward

BEYOND LIMITS is an organization built on the idea that all people have the potential to achieve their goals and become their truest selves. The mantra is to go beyond individuals' perceived limits to prove that they can achieve anything, even if they do it in unique ways. This concept is etched in BEYOND LIMITS' mission and everything it represents. The organization uses these ideas to help others reach their goals, whether through action or information.



Hello, my name is Jacqui Lowman, and this is my service dog, Saint. I am the founder of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, a 501c3 nonprofit, and I've never been shy about a challenge. I have my doctorate in communication. Not only is communication my subject of study, it is also my passion.



I am a professor of Professional Communication and Journalism at the University of Maine at Presque Isle. I've worked here since 2008, and I've found I've learned as much as I've taught. I suppose Saint is also a doctor by now, too. She's been to more classes than any student, though she can't blame the dog for eating her homework.



Usually, Saint and I can get by on our own. But even an experienced service dog can't predict what happened to me in 2012. Fortunately, not all my friends have four legs. Saint continued to revive me through the night until help arrived.



A ruptured artery and resulting blood loss put me in the hospital for an entire semester, and robbed me of my ability to speak. Though it was hard being away from my students, the challenge was nothing compared to learning to talk again. If there's one good thing about living with a disability, it's that it forces you to be patient. By the following semester, I was back in the classroom teaching, but with more determination than ever.



Through my recovery, I had this feeling that I wasn't quite done. There were more things I had to do, and more people I had to help. Once I had regained my health, I got to work on ways that allowed me to use my own experiences to help others.



I started BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, with the hopes of inspiring others. I want people to feel confident that they can tackle any challenge, and to do what “can’t be done.”



My first BEYOND LIMITS adventure was whitewater rafting on the Kennebec River in western Maine. With the help of river guides, Saint and I took on the state's most violent waterway. Category five rapids didn't scare me, but I can't say the same for Saint.



By the time we reached calm waters, I was already planning BEYOND LIMITS' next adventure.



Now hooked on adventure, Saint and I couldn't wait for the following summer. Fortunately for us, there's lots to do in the winter in snowy northern Maine.



Once we'd geared up, Saint and I tried our hands (and paws) at Nordic skiing. Thanks to a cleverly engineered Sit-Ski it wasn't long before we were tearing up the trails. Fortunately, we had the trails to ourselves as temperatures dipped below negative 20 degrees.



During some much needed time by the fire, my mind wandered. I asked myself, “What can BEYOND LIMITS do next?” As much as I enjoyed skiing, I wanted to do more- and I needed to do something bigger.



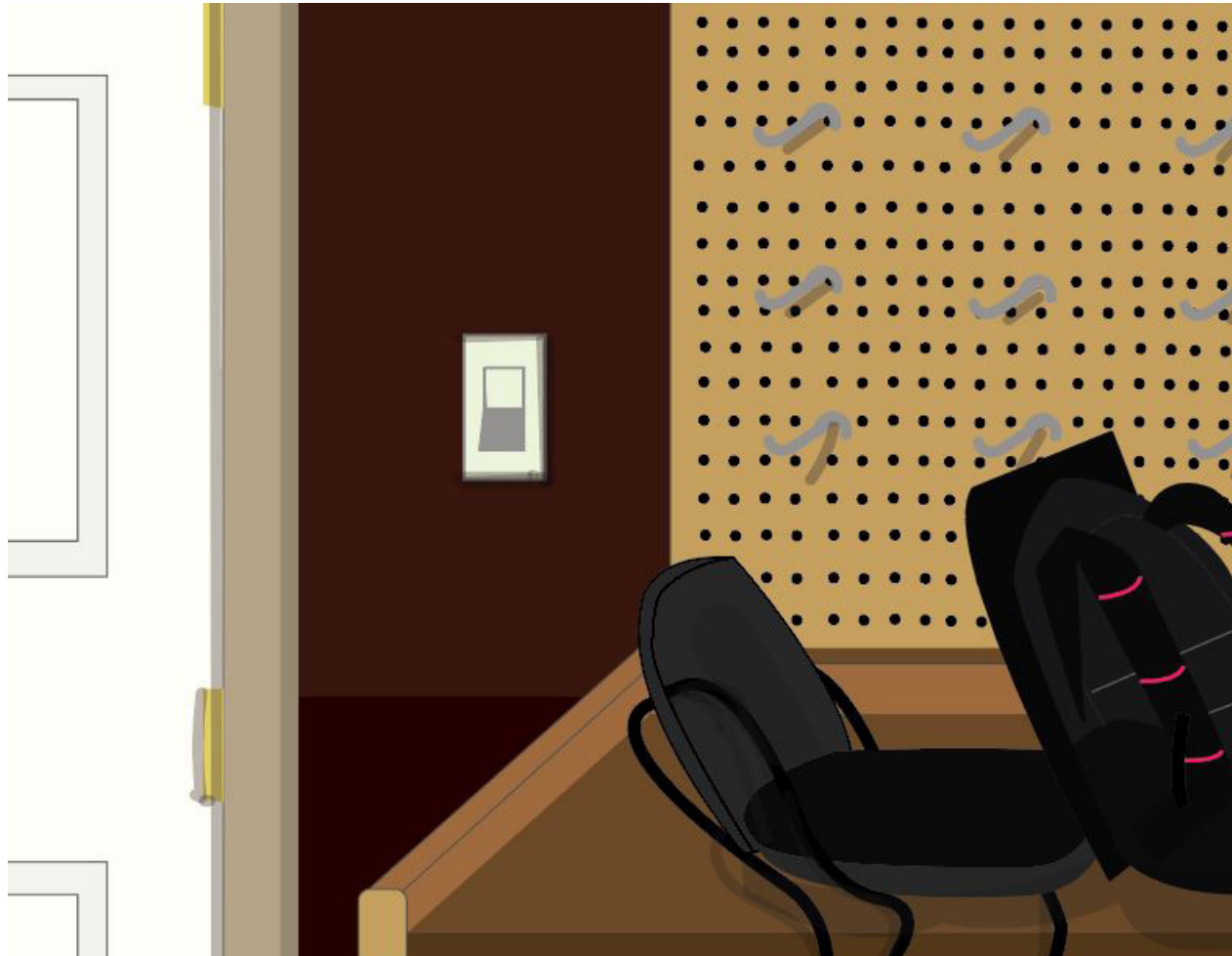
By the spring of 2015, Saint, and I and a team of volunteer hikers and local sherpas had finished training for BEYOND LIMITS' next adventure: to summit Mount Katahdin. Not only is the mountain Maine's highest peak, reaching exactly one mile into the sky, it is also full of Native culture-rich with nature and beautiful stories. I was taken by the beauty of the mountain the first time I saw it, but now, I was going to see the view from the top



On day one of the hike, our goal was to reach the first checkpoint on the mountain: the Chimney Pond campsite. I hiked using a backpack-like device that supported my legs while I held on to the Sherpas' shoulders. There were six Sherpas in total, and all of them took ten-minute rotations carrying me up the mountain. We ate dinner in the campsite shelter and went to bed early, eager for the following day's task.



We reached the summit of Katahdin on day two, almost two hours ahead of our goal. This left of plenty of time to hang out at the top. Photos were taken, tears were shed, and a rush of accomplishment and pride filled us all. Exactly one mile into the sky I heard my father's voice join the conversation. Much like me, Jack Lowman was always up for a challenge, and he playfully asked, "What took you so long?"



I loved almost everything about hiking Katahdin, and the next summer I wanted to do more. My friend and colleague, Al Levesque, redesigned the newly-coined “Jac-Pak” for longer excursions. Because we already did the northernmost peak in the Appalachian Trail, we decided to start at the other end for the summer’s trek.



In the middle of March, with a team of students from Clemson University, Saint and I started the next stage of our adventure at Springer Mountain in Georgia. The hiking was much easier in the southern part of the Appalachian Trail, and we made great time. More important, it was a great chance to spread the word about BEYOND LIMITS and what it is we do.



In total, we hiked roughly 120 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Our trek brought us through Georgia and into Virginia, and though we didn't do the whole trail, I'm grateful to be one of the few people to have seen the peaks at both ends.



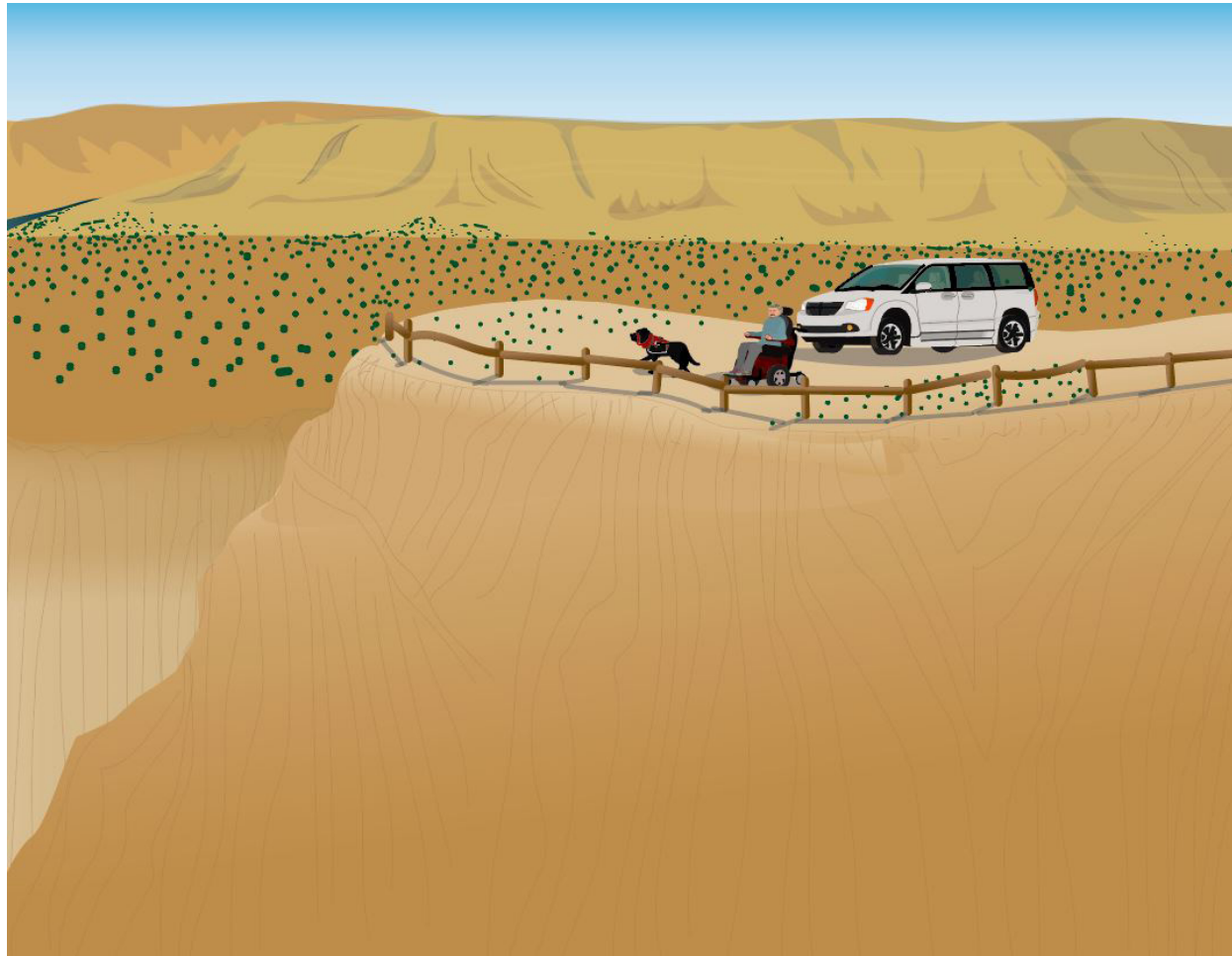
When I returned to Maine after the hike, I noticed a pattern in the adventures and realized that the organization's message might be misunderstood. I've done a lot of outdoor recreation because it's a very visual example for me, but outdoor activities and BEYOND LIMITS were becoming synonymous, and I was afraid people might think that's all the organization is about. For my next adventure, I wanted to plan something that really drove home BEYOND LIMITS' true message.



I began to think about my own inspirations and the path kept leading back to my father. I remember sitting around the table crying when Dad knew just what to say. Jack Lowman was full of sage advice but one piece in particular has stuck with me all these years. My dad taught me that being different is okay and to not use it as an excuse. Most important, he taught me if you can do something, you must do it.



For most people, driving across the country is a pretty big deal. For people with disabilities, there are even more challenges. For BEYOND LIMITS' next adventure, Saint and I set out in my modified van, Miracle, and we hit the highway. The goal of the trip was to show people how mobility is a human right, and that people should not be limited because of somebody else's perception of what is possible. I termed the adventure, "Back to Your Roots" because I was going to return to Utah, the state where my father was born. Quite literally, I was going back to my family's roots.



We made it to Utah relatively unscathed. There were some places where accessibility was lacking, but many other locations exceeded my expectations. Miracle had a struggle or two, but Saint and I were grateful she held up for the long trip. We made such great time that we even had time to do a bit of sightseeing.



Seeing the country state by state was a memorable experience for many reasons. Saint and I travelled where the roads took us, and I think the journey was just as memorable as its destinations. Not only did Saint and I see some of the most beautiful places in the world, we got to experience them, too. Every time I reached one of these places, I felt even closer to my dad. Again his words swarmed in my mind. “What took you so long?” he asks ever challenging me to push beyond my limits. After spending some cathartic time in Utah, we headed north. But as always, we stopped every chance we got to take in the beauty.



To get back to Maine, we drove through Canada. I expected some challenges with accessibility, but I was shocked to discover how inaccessible Canada is. Even rudimentary tasks such as rest area pit stops were nearly impossible. The entire experience made me very grateful for the Americans with Disabilities Act, and it also showed me how much work still needs to be done.



Even before the Back to the Roots journey, Saint's age was starting to show. I did my research and applied for a second service dog before Saint and I set off on our trip. It breaks my heart to see my best friend get older, but I know how important it is for me to have a capable service dog. While on the trip, my application was accepted by Assistance Canine Training Services. I liked what they offered and decided to work with the organization.



I met Dusty, the newest edition to our little family. Right away I could tell she was full of personality. She's always making me laugh, though I don't know if Saint agrees. Nonetheless, we love our little "chocolate kiss."



I find that working with Saint and Dusty teaches me something new every day. The girls learn, too, and as they do, our little team is strengthened. Life is full of surprises for us, but that's the good stuff. There's a lot more to come for the three of us, and BEYOND LIMITS, too. Trips to Detroit, the west coast and maybe even some advocacy overseas. No matter what challenges lie ahead, I welcome them all. If there's anything I've learned over our adventures, it's that change doesn't come easy, and it can take a lot of work. Or, as Jack Lowman would famously say, "It's where you go, it's what you do."

Author's Note

More information about BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential can be found online at beyondlimitsawaken.org. You can follow BEYOND LIMITS on Facebook, Instagram and even YouTube. I hope you enjoyed the story, and thank you for reading.

~Justin Ouellette

