

Going Beyond Their Limits:
The People Behind the Organization
A Series of Short Stories
By Melanee Terry



Author's Note

This Series of Short Stories is for those who are still struggling to move past their perceived limits. Thank you to BEYOND LIMITS and Professor Jacqui Lowman for teaching me that nothing is stronger than the human spirit.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank and send gratitude to every person who has helped me get to this point in my life, even if I do not mention you. Whether those people assisted me with my education or with my athletics: thank you. I am appreciative of every teacher, coach, mentor or friend I have ever had. I would not be here without you.

I want to continue by thanking the University of Maine at Presque Isle and the wonderful people involved with this institution. I want to acknowledge every student, community, faculty or staff member who has been kind to me. My collegiate journey has been amazing and it is because of the people whom I have been surrounded by.

I would like to thank everyone whom I interviewed for this project. I interviewed 14 incredible people and I appreciate every one of you. Thank you for taking time out of your day to talk with me. I had a wonderful conversation with each of you. I am honored that I was able to learn about your life and what you have contributed to BEYOND LIMITS. Thank you for letting me tell some of your story.

Next, I want to acknowledge a few members in the Marketing and Communications Office: Eric Brissette and Gayla Shaw. Thank you for showing me so much kindness these last four years. Thank you to Rowena McPherson for showing me the ropes of design. I appreciate your guidance throughout my college journey. Also, I am grateful for all your help with graphic design and helping me design the layout of this book. The last person in the office whom I would like to thank is Rachel Rice. You have been my mentor during my entire time at UMPI and I am so honored to have been your work study. Thank you for teaching me about public relations. It has been amazing working in your office, and I am so thankful that I had so much time with you guys. May the force be with you all!

I would like to thank my coach, Alissa Edwards, for pushing me athletically and academically to be the best possible version of myself. I appreciate your positivity and kind words every day. Additionally, I want to thank my teammates who are a part of the UMPI Owls softball team. I love you all and am thankful for every moment I get to spend with each of you. Thanks for making me

laugh and teaching me that it is OK to let loose and be yourself unconditionally. I will never forget you guys and I hope you won't forget me. Thank you for all the crazy memories.

I would like to acknowledge and send love to my parents for raising me and giving me a wonderful life. Thank you for waking up early and driving me to every one of my softball practices or games when I was little. Thanks for hiring a tutor for me when I was struggling in school. Thank you for giving me an amazing childhood and home to grow up in. You two gave me all the skills to succeed in life by always putting your children's needs first. I hope that I can continue to grow into the person who you always wanted me to be. I would not be in this position without you, and I am extremely thankful for everything you've both done.

Thank you to my siblings for showing me the ropes of adulthood. I am the last Terry child and I have some pretty great people to look up to. Paulette, thank you for teaching me about creativity. Aaron, thank you for teaching me how to be a leader. Last, Carissa, thank you for showing me how to have grace.

I want to also thank BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential for teaching me to be brave and have courage when things get tough. This organization has given me so many educational opportunities and I am grateful that I got to do this project for it.

Last, I want to thank the person who has guided me through my entire Professional Communication and Journalism career, Jacqui "Dr. J" Lowman. You have challenged me in so many ways and you have no idea how much these four years have meant to me. I respect you so much and you have definitely been one of the most impactful people in my life so far. Thank you for giving me confidence in my writing and PCJ capabilities. Thanks for teaching me about the difference between equality and equity, which is something that I will take with me wherever I go. I am forever indebted to you. Thank you for everything. Take care. Be well.

Introduction: A Writer and Her 14 Stories

As students in the PCJ program approach their senior year, they decide on a field experience practicum project to complete. When I went into my senior year, I knew I wanted to do a project that was interviewing and writing focused. During my earlier years in college, I noticed how much I enjoyed interviewing and writing. I loved meeting people and getting the opportunity to tell their stories. I enjoyed having conversations with others. Most of all, I loved storytelling. When the time came, I decided to write a Series of Short Stories on BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, Jacqui “Dr. J” Lowman and the people involved with the organization. As a student of Dr. J’s, I got to learn about BEYOND LIMITS and some of the people who contributed to the organization. I learned about the individuals who helped and inspired her along her journey to become a professor and live her life. I wanted to share these stories. I wanted to meet the people behind the organization. With my interviewing and writing capabilities, I knew that I could bring these stories to life. And I did.

This Series of Short Stories is a collection that I wrote during my senior year of college. It is a series of stories from 14 different people who all have relationships with BEYOND LIMITS and Dr. J. These stories discuss every person’s contribution and connection to BEYOND LIMITS. Many of these stories cover the friendship and bond these people have with Dr. J. The majority of these people had a professional relationship with Dr. J, but over time, they became personal friends. Accessibility and having the ability to live independently are very important to Dr. J and I touch upon them in every story as well. This book explores some of the most important things in my professor’s life: accessibility, friendship and BEYOND LIMITS.

This Series of Short Stories matters because it is advocating for an empowering organization that teaches others to move past their perceived limits. My work in the book matters because it educates people about BEYOND LIMITS and it inspires people to overcome their limits, whatever they may be. A large part of my project was explaining to my readers that BEYOND LIMITS is not just about recreation or the fact that Dr. J is in a wheelchair. BEYOND LIMITS is an organi

zation for everyone of all ages, sizes, ethnicities, and education levels, which is something that I made clear in my stories.

Writing these stories allowed me to tell BEYOND LIMITS' story and continue the organization's journey. By telling the stories and experiences of each interviewee, I was continuing some of the organization's mission: outreach, education and advocacy. I hope that this book speaks to people and hopefully invites them to stay updated with BEYOND LIMITS in the future. Dr. J has a couple of adventures already planned for BEYOND LIMITS. A goal is that you stay connected and follow along with Dr. J's next incredible journey.

I hope that this Series of Short Stories inspires you to do something that you never thought you could do. If I can motivate at least one person, then I think that I did my job. I was honored to have the opportunity to write this book and it is something that I hope resonates in everyone who reads it.

Going Beyond Their Limits: The People Behind the Organization



Kim-Anne Perkins is a close friend of Jacqui “Dr. J” Lowman and is a longtime supporter of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential. She is pictured above with Dr. J’s service dog, Saint.

Chapter 1: A Friendship for the Ages

Kim-Anne Perkins, a decade-long friend of Jacqui Lowman's, accomplished a lot during her time as an educator all the University of Maine at Presque Isle. As the individual who started the social work program at UMPI in 1983, she provided a lot to the university and the program during her time there. Despite retiring from the university a couple of years ago, she is still making a difference through her work with BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential and her strong friendship with Jacqui Lowman.

Professor Jacqui Lowman arrived at UMPI a little over a decade ago when faculty offices were in Normal Hall. Jacqui's office was on the first floor and Kim-Anne walked by it every day. After many conversations, they discovered their similarity and started a friendship. Kim-Anne asked Jacqui to help her with some projects on campus and their friendship blossomed from there.

"Our relationship moved from just professional acquaintances to mutual interests. She and I were very, very quickly able to collaborate and get things done. We did very well together," Kim-Anne said. "My social work side kicked in when there were problems that she needed help with in terms of where to go on campus and how to get things. I really liked helping her resolve those issues."

During their first years of friendship, Jacqui was using a cane. She had issues with accessibility during her entire time at UMPI and Kim-Anne has always been there to assist. As a social worker, Kim-Anne was always willing to step up for those around her. Kim-Anne noticed some issues with Dr. J's ability to move around campus and how difficult it was to get help. While many people were willing to help her, others showed little interest or were even hostile.

"I was immediately aware of it and she had become used to it, so, she wasn't as reactive. I was quite reactive to the fact that if we showed up someplace, people would automatically talk to me and wouldn't talk to her. I would just walk away," Kim-Anne said. "We've had problems with parking when people did not honor cross hatching. We have gotten stuck places. We've also had

scenarios of inaccessible bathrooms for her to use.”

Kim-Anne and Jacqui’s decade-long friendship is composed of many memories, but what makes their friendship so successful is their differences. While Jacqui is known for her calmness and witty self, Kim-Anne is not afraid to speak up for what she believes in, even if it means showing emotion. Although Jacqui can defend herself, Kim-Anne will always do what she can for her friend. These characteristics complement one another well and make for a strong friendship.

As a person with paraplegia and one of the few people in the University of Maine System using a wheelchair, Jacqui does not turn her head from a challenge. Many lessons she teaches to her students have to do with human decency and putting yourself in someone else’s shoes. Opening a door and picking something off the ground are simple to most people. Jacqui encourages her students to think what it could be like to have a challenge. By using herself as an example, she is creating a teachable moment for someone else.

“I think her life goal is using herself as an example. You can take an attitude that everybody is against you or you can take the attitude as a teachable moment. And she absolutely takes the attitude of it being a teachable moment,” Kim-Anne said.

In 2012, Jacqui had a lifechanging experience when she had an abdominal aortic aneurysm. Anyone who knows Jacqui is aware of her dedication to work and educating her students. Jacqui could not return to work as she desired because she was on short term disability. Her ability to be physically at work was put on pause for one of the first times. Jacqui was forced to slow down and take a step back because of the aneurysm. She had to rethink her life and the path that she was going in.

“Not being able to work was just a foreign concept to her. She really had to stop and consider what happened to her because she hadn’t stopped yet,” Kim-Anne said. “So that was the beginning of not a change, but a refocus. This is where she started to refocus on what she wanted to do and how she could do it.”

According to NHS Inform, a ruptured abdominal aneurysm causes massive internal bleeding, which is usually fatal. Around eight out of ten of those people either die before they reach the

Chapter 1: A Friendship for the Ages

hospital or don't survive surgery. Individuals who survive this type of aneurysm usually take months to recover. Jacqui was a part of the people who survive. Jacqui wondered if it all meant something. She did not die, and she thought it must have been for a reason.

If the aneurysm had not happened, BEYOND LIMITS may have never been created. The weeks after the aneurysm, BEYOND LIMITS started to develop. BEYOND LIMITS was a small thought that Jacqui had on her way home from the hospital. She drove up to the overlook of Mount Katahdin and she had an idea. The mountain that she was looking at was something that she had always loved. What would it take to be able to look from the top of it?

“BEYOND LIMITS is about the opportunity for people to come and understand a life challenge, then figure out how they can accomplish it from an altruistic point of view,” Kim Anne said. “Each of us has a path. Each of us has our personal goals and BEYOND LIMITS is an opportunity for people to reach beyond their limits of their goals and think about their commitment value or what they have to offer to somebody else.”

Kim-Anne discovered her role in BEYOND LIMITS due to her close friendship with Jacqui. She was the first person Jacqui told whenever she had a new idea or thought for BEYOND LIMITS. Kim-Anne has been there from the beginning. She supported and listened to Jacqui's ideas for BEYOND LIMITS when others thought she was crazy.

“I usually am the person that she starts an idea with and I'm also the person that always says ‘Yes, you can,’” Kim-Anne said. “My role is to listen to what she has to say and if that's what she wants to do, I help her figure out how to put it in motion.”

Kim-Anne was also with Jacqui as she looked into getting a service dog. When Dr. J was in the process of receiving Saint, Kim-Anne encouraged her to tell the service dog organization about her students and their projects. This sparked many ideas in Jacqui and would eventually benefit her students and their projects.

“That is a good example of how I help. My way of thinking is always about collaboration and advocacy or how it is going to be useful,” Kim-Anne said. “I think one of my biggest roles has been that I've never said no. I've never said, ‘Nope, that's not a possibility.’ If I feel it's going to be

difficult, I'll talk through all the difficulties, but I'm not ever going to say no."

Kim-Anne believes Jacqui has learned to always be open with everyone she works with. She understands that the organization is not just about her. The projects her students complete are a big part of the success. Each year, her students in the Professional Communication and Journalism program complete projects that help advance BEYOND LIMITS. Their skills and talents are seen through their projects, which is something Kim-Anne admires.

"I think that's another example of why BEYOND LIMITS can be successful. The chief, Dr. J, is more than willing to ask other people for suggestions. She takes zero responsibility for being the one and only one to make it work," Kim-Anne said. "She really does depend on everybody being challenged to use their expertise to help whatever that achievement is going to be."

Despite everything that Jacqui has taught to others, Kim-Anne has discovered that some individuals find it selfish. Many people think that she is attention seeking, when in reality she is using herself as an educative tool. Although people's misunderstanding is frustrating, Kim-Anne continues to teach them that Jacqui is only trying to use herself as a tool for others.

Looking back at her years with BEYOND LIMITS, Kim-Anne understands that everyone has different challenges in the world. The organization has given her the opportunity look at the world from a different perspective and allow herself to be aware of issues she may not see in her own life.

"The opportunity to see and understand challenges from her perspective makes me a better person. It makes me feel better about social justice, economic justice and those issues," Kim-Anne said. "I feel that BEYOND LIMITS represents opportunity for growth, in the broadest terms: personal growth, emotional growth, and social growth. The sense of awareness that you feel when you see another culture, system or society is huge."

Kim-Anne and Jacqui's friendship is a special one because of the two people who are in it. They are individuals who make each other better every year they spend together. Every trip they go on, they learn something new. They help each other climb mountains. They help each other with family emergencies. They understand their roles in society and know that they are more

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than capable of achieving anything they put their minds to. Kim-Anne changes lives through social work and Jacqui educates her students in communication. Their roles are different, but they both are making a difference in others' lives. They dedicate their lives to others and advocate whenever necessary. It is complete selflessness. They are the epitome of friendship because of their compassion and generosity.

“I see myself as a student with her and I think she’s given me lots of opportunities to become more aware of issues in the world,” Kim-Anne said. “That tenacity she has is something that I admire greatly, and I feel a really strong wistfulness that I could become more tenacious. That’s just something that she has in her makeup, you know, she is able to have a dream and then follow it through.”



Meghan Legassie is an UMPI graduate with a degree in Professional Communication and Journalism. She grew close to her professor, Dr. J, during her four years at the university. Meghan and Dr. J developed this relationship through many long conversations and meetings in her office. Meghan is seen in the image above petting Saint during one of those conversations.

Chapter 2: Going Beyond Your Inner Limits

A Professional Communication and Journalism graduate from the University of Maine at Presque Isle, Meghan Legassie grew exponentially during her time in college with BEYOND LIMITS and Professor Jacqui Lowman. She faced many inner battles as a PCJ major and had to step out of her comfort zone. She is now living in Bangor, working as an activities assistant at a nursing home. The challenges she conquered in college have made her a better person, which is something she still carries with her today. The experiences she had with BEYOND LIMITS and her relationship with Dr. J are things she will reflect on for the rest of her life.

Meghan started college in 2014 as an undecided major and was unsure of what she wanted to pursue a degree in. During many meetings with her advisor, she stumbled upon PCJ and found that her love for writing could be expressed through that program. As she started her classes, she quickly learned a lot about herself. Meghan was in a new place and she knew practically no one. As a quiet individual, her first few months of classes were very intimidating.

“I was a pretty shy person, especially at my start of college, because I didn’t know anyone,” Meghan said. “It’s weird going from high school where I knew everyone in my class to all these new people. I was in many rooms where I did not know anyone.”

While taking her first classes with Dr. J, Meghan noticed the way Dr. J makes her students feel when they walk into class. She makes an effort to get to know her students and help them with anything they need, even outside of academics. Many students at UMPI find PCJ classes intimidating because there is so much class participation. Students need to consistently participate during class time, and this can be difficult for any student. Due to PCJ’s small class sizes and Dr. J’s friendly nature, Meghan began to feel welcome in her classes.

“Dr. J has a way of pulling her students and getting them to participate while bettering themselves,” Meghan said. “Every semester she would meet with us and talk about how we were doing or our expectations for class. I remember my first meeting. I was a little shy and probably

paid more attention to Saint than Dr. J.”

When she graduated from UMPI, Meghan found that her relationship with Dr. J was even more important than she thought. Although she was her professor and advisor, she also found a way to talk to students about anything they need in their personal lives. Jacqui does not have to, but she makes time to talk with her students outside of class. When you graduate from the PCJ program, Dr. J is not only your professor, but a friend.

“As the years went on, she kind of turned into a friend, as well as a professor. She is definitely still a pretty big part of my life. If I need anything, she is always there to help me,” Meghan said.

During their time at UMPI, PCJ majors complete many projects. For the last couple of years, these students have worked on projects of Dr. J’s nonprofit organization, BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential. For one of her projects, Meghan helped Dr. J during her Appalachian Trail adventures. She spent a lot of her time planning the hikes. She had to find volunteers online for the Appalachian Trail adventure and research equipment. Meghan was able to be there, virtually, every step of the way with Dr. J.

“Watching her hike some of the Appalachian Trail was amazing. I mean, I think about it and I don’t think I could do that,” Meghan said.

College was even more of a challenge for Meghan because of her struggles with anxiety. She had to face her anxiety head-on during her projects for BEYOND LIMITS. During one of her BEYOND LIMITS projects, she had to cold call multiple people all over the country from different schools and departments. After putting her phone calls off till the last minute, she finally took the leap and dialed their numbers.

“I am not good on the phone and I don’t like talking on the phone. If I can text or email, that’s perfectly fine,” Meghan said. “One of my worst fears was calling people on the phone, especially if they didn’t know who I was. Making those calls was a huge step for me.”

As Meghan has dealt with anxiety, she has thought about other individuals’ battles. She often thinks about her anxiety and then Dr. J’s paraplegia. Meghan compares her troubles with Dr. J’s and realizes that Dr. J has had to deal with so much more. Although they are different struggles,

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they are still struggles. We all have our own personal battles. Dr. J is the face of BEYOND LIMITS, but that doesn't mean the organization is for her.

"I look at Dr. J and think that she pushed beyond her limits. Seeing her do everything she has done as a paraplegic is incredible. It makes me think that I can do anything. Although she has bigger struggles, I have my own and everyone has their own," Meghan said. "I think a lot of people might look at BEYOND LIMITS and think, 'Well, this is only something for people with disabilities.' But it is really for everyone."

When Meghan started in the PCJ program, BEYOND LIMITS was just growing. She was with BEYOND LIMITS near the beginning of the organization. She helped progress BEYOND LIMITS, even when it was much smaller. Since graduating, she has still been connected to BEYOND LIMITS, watching her fellow classmates come through the program.

"It's so cool to see how BEYOND LIMITS has grown as an organization. We didn't think BEYOND LIMITS was going to get this far. It's really cool to see it grow and see how the current PCJ students are using what we did in their projects," Meghan said. "Being a part of something in the beginning and then watching it continue to grow is special to see."

BEYOND LIMITS has helped Meghan in ways she never would have thought. She completed many projects, presentations and phone calls, which has given her experiences that she never thought she could do. She gained confidence in her work and in herself through her time at UMPI. Everything that she did with BEYOND LIMITS and Dr. J has given her the opportunity to trust herself and be confident in her actions outside of college.

"BEYOND LIMITS has definitely made me more confident as a person. I've still got a long way to go, but I'm definitely more confident and I always think back to BEYOND LIMITS," Meghan said. "If I wasn't a part of BEYOND LIMITS, I might not be where I am today in terms of confidence and talking to people I don't know."

A couple of years ago, Meghan was a quiet freshman and now she is a confident college graduate taking on the real world. Her relationship with Dr. J is something that she will be able to carry on with her forever. Dr. J was not only Meghan's professor, but a friend. Meghan's four years

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in college allowed her to gain confidence and grow as a person. Having Dr. J as a professor and being a part of BEYOND LIMITS was a life-changing experience that will be with her for the rest of her life.

“Throughout BEYOND LIMITS and going through all these amazing experiences with Dr. J, I have learned a lot. It was hard, and I was uncomfortable, but I got through it. I lived,” Meghan said. “Many things are going to be uncomfortable and hard, but I have more confidence knowing I can get through it.”



Meghan was able to visit Dr. J's home and got to spend some quality time with her professor and Saint, pictured above.



Pam Easler is a friend and colleague of Jacqui's. She has supported Jacqui during every adventure she has taken with BEYOND LIMITS, and she is pictured here with Saint.

Chapter 3: The Hero and Her Sidekick

Pam Easler, a close friend of Professor Jacqui Lowman's, has spent her life dedicated to helping those around her. An Aroostook County native, Pam is an administrative specialist for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Maine at Presque Isle. With two adult daughters and as a board member of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, Pam stays busy. Her dedication to work, her friendship with Jacqui, and her commitment to her family is what truly makes her a go-getter.

Pam's education also plays an important role in her current success. Pam was one of the first people at UMPI to get a degree from the YourPace program. At the time, it was a pilot program and it had just started with a few people. She already had an associate degree from Northern Maine Community College and just needed 90 more credits in order to get her bachelor's degree.

Pam had originally started at UMPI in the TRIO Upward Bound program and worked there for a little over a year. Jacqui and Pam did not each other well, but Pam knew her from the times she would come over to the TRIO offices and teach many of the Upward Bound students English classes. When a job opportunity came up for the College of Arts and Sciences as an administrative specialist, Pam applied. She got that job and one of the first assignments for that position was to be secretary for the faculty assembly. Jacqui was also a part of the assembly and this is where their friendship grew.

"It's part of the structure and the governance at UMPI to have Faculty Assembly, and Dr. Lowman was the chair of that committee. I was very new, so she helped me out. I didn't know everybody's names and I didn't know the lay of the land. She guided me," Pam said.

Pam and Jacqui's relationship went from professional to personal during these years. Pam became a member of the University Senate and Jacqui followed. After some begging and pleading from Pam, Jacqui volunteered and ended up becoming the chair of the University Senate. Being a part of these committees and groups allowed the two women to grow their friendship in ways

they would have never thought.

“We had lots of time to work together and I would do the minutes for the meetings we were in. She would always be my editor and tell me where I made a mistake. She has those eagle eyes and she’d find anything. That’s kind of how I got to know her,” Pam said. “We started to hang out and she would invite me over to see her student presentations at the end of the semesters. Then, I got involved with BEYOND LIMITS. It’s just kind of a relationship that I think has snowballed.”

Pam was with Jacqui during committee meetings, but was also willing to help her with BEYOND LIMITS. As a board member for the nonprofit organization, Pam has done many things for Jacqui and her students who are involved. Pam assists Jacqui with brainstorming and getting the word out about BEYOND LIMITS. She has made business cards so that Jacqui could distribute them. Pam has helped Jacqui’s students with their class projects for BEYOND LIMITS. When Jacqui was in the process of getting another service dog, Pam took videos of her and Saint when they were in the application process.

During their years of friendship, Pam noticed some difficulties Jacqui, as a person with paraplegia, had around campus. There were many areas on campus Jacqui had trouble accessing and Pam was eager to help. Years ago, Pam helped Jacqui when there needed to be an accessible parking spot outside of South Hall. Pam took pictures of the areas and sent them to the necessary person. Whenever there is an issue on campus with accessibility, Pam is always willing to step up for her good friend. Pam and Jacqui are always looking for ways to educate those around them about accessibility.

“I think there are still some people who just don’t really care or don’t have that empathy. We keep working to educate people and I do think it’s getting better. But I do think there’s more work to be done,” Pam said. “Jacqui does most of it. I’m sort of her sidekick, but we kind of work together on those things.”

Pam’s efforts to help people with disabilities did not come from nowhere. Pam has a 26-year-old daughter, Nicole, who was born with Leber’s congenital amaurosis. Nicole was born missing the cone and broad cells in the retina of her eyes. It’s an auto-recessive gene and it causes different amounts of visual impairment in a variety of people. The condition is different in every person

Chapter 3: The Hero and Her Sidekick

who has it. As Nicole grew up in Aroostook County, she had difficulties in the education system and getting everything she needed.

As a young girl with visual impairment, Nicole struggled in school because she did not have the necessary tools. Pam taught herself Braille so that she could teach it to Nicole. She even created Braille books for Nicole. Pam had to fight for her daughter so that Nicole could have what she needed in school. Nicole needed a proper Braille instructor, which can be difficult to find in northern Maine. Nicole was finally able to get a teacher because of Pam's constant dedication to her daughter.

"I tried to supplement as much as I could when she was really young," Pam said. "I learned how to read Braille. I used to make her little books and she was kicking and screaming, but we got her to learn to read and do the things that she needed to do."



Jacqui and Saint visit Pam's office.

Nicole did not have it easy because of the limited resources in the area. Pam had to go to Individualized Education Program meetings and fight for what Nicole needed. She would go into meetings with the state special education regulations book. She would put that book down on the table for everyone to see.

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“I had to fight with the legislators, and I had to fight with senators. We really went through a lot with getting her the education that she needed. It was extremely difficult. We had a lot of issues getting her a proper education,” Pam said.

Nicole is now living on her own in an apartment. She is on the spectrum and goes to a program during the day. Nicole has friends in the building, and she has parties in her apartment. Like any other young woman, she has sleepovers, pizza parties and hangouts with her friends. Despite her struggles as a child in the education system, Nicole is currently living her best life because she has a mother who never stopped fighting for her.

Although Nicole and Jacqui have very different disabilities, Pam sees some similarities in the way they are treated. Jacqui has been to many places with friends where people have not even spoken to her: they speak to her friends. Many people think that people with disabilities are not smart or can not think for themselves. Individuals with disabilities are all different. Many people often make assumptions before they meet people with disabilities.

“Anytime someone is different, regardless of what the difference is, people can sometimes prejudge without getting to know them,” Pam said. “Everybody is an individual and everyone has different strengths and weaknesses.”

Pam was a part of BEYOND LIMITS when Jacqui climbed Mount Katahdin. She was able to see the behind-the-scenes steps that Jacqui took for the hike. Pam saw the preparation for the hike and all the things Jacqui did. Pam was impressed with how Jacqui took those steps. Before and after the hike, Jacqui continually taught others and educated them about BEYOND LIMITS and what it stands for.

“I am not so much impressed that she did it, because I had no doubt she could do it. It was really her determination to make the other people know that she could do it,” Pam said. “Her determination to coordinate that with other people and then going out and doing it is what is impressive.”

Pam’s knowledge about disabilities and willingness to fight for the people in her life is what makes her special. Her time at UMPI and with BEYOND LIMITS has allowed her to gain a friend

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in Jacqui, something that will be with her for a long time.

“She certainly has added a lot to my life, because she’s been a friend and she’s been a mentor. She’s helped me navigate and be successful in my job. She’s offered me support and friendship,” Pam said.

Through Pam’s dedication to her daughter and friendship with Jacqui, she has learned a lot about disabilities. She taught herself Braille, so that her daughter could have a proper education. She helped Jacqui with accessibility around campus when she didn’t have to. Everything she ever did for BEYOND LIMITS and Jacqui was done with passion. Pam has done extraordinary things for those around her, which makes her the perfect sidekick in Jacqui’s story. Every hero needs a sidekick and Pam is Jacqui’s.



Nea Herzfeld is an old friend and mentor of Jacqui's. She has been there for Jacqui throughout the last 50 years. Although years have passed, Nea and Jacqui still stay in touch and keep up their friendship. As a supporter of BEYOND LIMITS, Nea has always believed in the organization's mission. Pictured is Nea out to lunch with Jacqui a few years ago.

Chapter 4: Making Each Other Better

Recent retiree Nea Herzfeld is one of Professor Jacqui Lowman's oldest friends. Nea met Jacqui decades ago in Greece during a turning point in their lives. Nea worked for a study abroad program in Greece for 42 years and she met Jacqui during a couple of her first years in the program. Jacqui was in the program and they developed a personal relationship. Jacqui's time in Greece was difficult due to her father's sudden death. Nea was there for her during his death and is still there for Jacqui as a member of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential.

Nea's husband, Michael Herzfeld, was an anthropology professor at Harvard University. The two individuals met in Greece. While he was in Greece doing work, Michael decided that he wanted to branch out and travel to other places for his fieldwork. The pair have travelled to Italy, Thailand, Greece, Hong Kong and more. Nea continues to make time for Jacqui and their friendship, even though it could be very easy to be distant since they live so far away from each other.

During the beginning of their friendship, Nea remembers Jacqui's coming into her office very often. Nea had a large, comfy chair where Jacqui would sit and they would talk for hours. Nea was able to meet Jacqui's parents when they came out to Greece to visit. Nea supported Jacqui when her father died afterwards. Of Jacqui's current friends, Nea is the only person to have actually met her father. Anyone who knows Jacqui is aware of the impact he had on her.

"I don't recall what we talked about. It was no more than about five minutes. It was a very pleasant interlude. But it was very, very short," Nea said. "My knowledge of her parents, especially her father, is really from the stories that she has told me over the years."

After losing contact for a couple of years, their friendship rekindled. When Jacqui was back in New England, she needed a transcript from the program in Greece so that she could apply to graduate school. They were able to reconnect and Nea drove down from Cambridge to see Jacqui in Connecticut, where she was living. They have been in close contact ever since. When

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the weather cooperates, Nea braves a northern Maine winter and comes up in January to visit her friend. The two women enjoy going up to Fort Kent for a beautiful drive whenever they can.

“She loves going up to Fort Kent and it’s just a wonderful drive. And so, if the weather works and if she has the time, I usually come up in January and we do that,” Nea said.

As close friends, they have been able to travel together and have spent time with each other in different countries. Nea has seen firsthand the difficulties Jacqui has had physically. Although Jacqui used a cane when they met, Nea has been able to see Jacqui physically change over the years. She has seen her during different phases in her life. Now that she is in a wheelchair, Nea notices how Jacqui has changed mentally, involving her confidence and approach to life.

“She’s certainly gotten much more positive,” Nea said. “In the years I’ve known her, she’s gotten much more confident in her ability to do things.”

Her close relationship with Jacqui allows her to be a part of BEYOND LIMITS very easily. Unlike other individuals involved with the organization, Nea has a unique role for BEYOND LIMITS. Since she does not live in the area, she is not able to meet up and have casual discussions with other organization members. Nea is not able to collaborate on BEYOND LIMITS in the same way as the others. She uses her voice for the organization, virtually, through Zoom meetings and phone calls.

“I wasn’t involved in it in the beginning of BEYOND LIMITS and she decided that I needed this involvement. I know when Jacqui decides something, it happens,” Nea said.

As the secretary of BEYOND LIMITS, Nea makes an impact on the organization. As a member, she contributes to board meetings. She helps with developing ideas for the organization. Being a part of the organization has allowed Nea to educate herself and others about BEYOND LIMITS and its message. Nea sees that one of the most important aspects about BEYOND LIMITS is the connections it makes with people. Her friendship with Jacqui gives her the opportunity to challenge herself. She continues to be a part of BEYOND LIMITS because it gives her new opportunities and experiences that she wouldn’t have elsewhere. She admires Jacqui and her willingness to educate the public and encourage others.

Chapter 4: Making Each Other Better

“I think it’s the outreach. The fact that she can climb Mount Katahdin is great, but really what’s important to me is what she’s telling people while she is doing it,” Nea said. “It’s definitely an inspiration for people to not give in or let the world come crashing down around you.”

Jacqui has changed Nea’s outlook on life. When Nea travels and explores different countries, she observes her surroundings in new ways. When Jacqui and Nea were in Greece, many of the areas in the country mostly had stairs. It was difficult for Jacqui to maneuver, even when she was using a cane. Nea’s friendship with Jacqui allows her to see things from a new perspective.

“One of the things she has done for me is that she makes me look at every building I encounter,” Nea said. “I particularly noticed all of the places in Athens, where we met. It never really occurred to me that all the apartments and buildings had stairs.”

Although they lost the connection of their friendship temporarily, Jacqui and Nea are closer than ever. Nea has motivated and encouraged Jacqui to pursue an education in graduate school. Nea has been a friend to Jacqui during family deaths and hard times she has had. Jacqui has inspired Nea to educate others and teach them that they can go beyond their limits. They have both affected each other in ways that are perfect fit for a long-lasting friendship.

“Her incredible spirit and determination, that is what I think is really the inspiration,” Nea said. “I think everyone who knows her sees that this is a woman who doesn’t understand the word ‘can’t.’”



Dr. Deb Roark is the treasurer for BEYOND LIMITS and Jacqui's colleague. Although she joined the organization later on, she is still a key contributor to BEYOND LIMITS' success. Dr. Deb is pictured above as she is kissed by Saint.

Chapter 5: Discovering Her Inner Strength

At the University of Maine at Presque Isle, Dr. Deborah “Deb” Roark and Professor Jacqui Lowman are friends and colleagues. They also share a connection through BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential. Deb is an Aroostook County native who made her way back to northern Maine a few years ago where she met Jacqui and joined BEYOND LIMITS, which would eventually change the way she approached life.

Deb is originally from Fort Fairfield but has lived in various places across the country including Florida, California, South Carolina, Washington, D.C., and Texas. Her husband was a naval officer, so they traveled frequently for his work.

Before their marriage, Deb attended the University of Maine at Orono and received a bachelor’s of science in business administration. She became a banker and worked in Portland, where she met her husband. When they lived in Florida, Deb worked on her master’s through the University of North Florida. They finally landed in Texas and she continued her career as a banker. Deb started teaching business classes at a local college, where she discovered a passion for education. She loved the college environment and was hired in a grant’s development office at a university.

“Then, I decided if I’m going to stay in higher ed, then I should get a credential in education,” Deb said. “While I was working at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth, I worked on and received my doctorate in educational administration. So, that was kind of my sequence of work and educational progression.”

While she was in Texas, she saw a Facebook post of Jacqui climbing Mount Katahdin for BEYOND LIMITS. After some research, she learned about the organization and found out its founder was a professor at UMPI, a university close to her hometown

“I thought, well that’s the coolest thing I ever saw. I thought that was absolutely amazing. The whole idea behind BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential was really cool because it was just

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something I'd never seen and that I had never really envisioned before," Deb said. "It was a really inspirational story and how that foundation was also helping others achieve their potential."

Deb's husband retired from the Navy and he had been working at a local university doing emergency preparedness and business continuity. He has a background in military and police officer training, so the position was ideal. Deb was traveling to work 55 miles away in stop-and-go traffic. They had always lived in major metropolitan areas, so the couple decided that they were ready for a new start.

"Our daughter was graduating college and we were ready for change," Deb said. "A lot of my background's actually in grant writing, foundation and corporate relations, government relations, so I have done a lot of different things. So, to come to UMPI and be able to serve in this role with advancement was a perfect opportunity. The timing was perfect, and the stars aligned, if you will."

She was hired at UMPI and moved back to the County. Deb was excited to come back to her roots and give back to the community. She knew that she could bring her skills to UMPI and help the institution secure financial support through grants and other funding. Deb looked forward to assisting the university with new program development, new facilities and new technology.

"I moved here in August from that area. I got to come back home and try to help our local community in the way in which I was best able," Deb said. "So, coming to UMPI and being able to help secure funding through grants and gifts to help us with our larger mission and vision of our institution was special."

During Deb's first months at the university, she met Jacqui at a soccer game. Deb knew her from the Facebook post and was looking forward to meeting her once she got back to the County. She was trying to meet a lot of people once she got back because this was the first time she had lived there since the '80s. The two women had a great conversation and quickly started a friendship.

"I was hired at UMPI and came here and actually met Dr. J at a soccer game because we're all on the sidelines, faculty and staff. So, that's how I first met her. From there, we just started talking and became friends as well as colleagues," Deb said.

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Deb is on the foundation board as the treasurer for BEYOND LIMITS. As someone in this position, she contributes to the organization's finances. She is in charge of the organization's money and tax returns. She files the annual corporate charter, which every nonprofit in the state of Maine has to do. When Jacqui is traveling, Deb makes sure she has money in the fund.

When Jacqui drove across the country, Deb helped catalog and made sure she had everything she needed. Deb helped Jacqui load up the van before they left. Throughout the trip, Deb served as a resource for her friend. She was a phone call away in case Jacqui needed any help during the journey.



Throughout Dr. Deb's partnership with BEYOND LIMITS, she created a close friendship with Jacqui. They have had many quality conversations together, which is pictured above.

As a friend of Jacqui and contributor to the UMPI community, Deb does everything she can to help her friend and the school. Deb acts as a client in Jacqui's PCJ 215 business communication classes. In that class, Jacqui's students work on a project organizing UMPI's Homecoming. The project is perfect for the students who have to work on their communication and organization

skills. The students create a memo, itinerary and agenda, which is very beneficial to the class's objectives.

In the students' Homecoming projects, they get to create events and activities that could potentially be useful for Deb, who is charge of organizing the university's weekend events every year. As a client of the class, Deb gets to hear student feedback and recommendations from the students themselves. She is able to work closely with the students at the university, while helping out her friend and colleague, Jacqui.

"We've been able to gather a lot of great input and feedback from students that we've been able to incorporate into Homecoming weekend," Deb said. "We have been starting to add in things that students have talked about over the years. Those ideas are coming from the students' voices and it has been significant to Homecoming's success."

In 2019, Deb helped Jacqui with her PCJ 315 class when they conducted focus groups that semester. Deb was a part of student enrollment management and she knew that this could be a great opportunity for the PCJ 315 class. All semester long, she worked closely with Jacqui and her students.

"That was really great, and it was nice to hear the students' perspective through the students who ran the focus groups," Deb said. "It was great training for students doing the focus groups and learning how to do qualitative analysis, coding, sequencing and all those things that you do in that class."

Deb's friendship with Jacqui has taught her the importance of accessibility. Deb has helped Jacqui in her home and even helped her get a new wheelchair when she was having trouble with her insurance. She made connections and spoke to people in the University of Maine System, so Jacqui could get what she needed. Deb is aware of the difficulties Jacqui has had to face around campus and does everything she can do to assist.

"I think accessibility and the snow is challenging with her wheelchair. I know there's been challenges at times with parking outside the building and getting in," Deb said. "She is extremely resilient, and she is a 'getter done' kind of lady. And where there's a will, there's a way, which she

does every day.”

Deb’s journey with BEYOND LIMITS has taught her a lot and has given her a new perspective on life. She has many favorite BEYOND LIMITS moments. Deb admires Jacqui for taking the trip across the country, hiking parts of the Appalachian Trail and every other amazing thing she has done.

“The Katahdin climb was what inspired me the most in the very beginning, before I ever met her,” Deb said. “Obviously since I’ve met her and gotten to know her, just the woman that she is and her determination to move forward and to be able to overcome challenges is just inspirational in general.”

Deb loves that the organization has the opportunity to work with so many different groups of people from all backgrounds. She believes that BEYOND LIMITS allows people to learn and grow through whatever difficulties they might be facing. Everyone’s challenges are different, and Deb believes that BEYOND LIMITS can help people move past those barriers.

“It gives people the inner strength to move things forward. It is about bringing all these different individuals together and recognizing that everybody has their own strengths, but how they can work together to help lift up each other,” Deb said.

When Deb traveled back to Aroostook County a few years ago, she knew she wanted to meet the founder of BEYOND LIMITS. Now that they have met, Deb and Jacqui are not only colleagues, but friends. Deb became inspired by BEYOND LIMITS and its message, which started when she saw a Facebook post. Deb’s partnership and friendship with Jacqui have allowed her to be a key member of BEYOND LIMITS and every person the organization inspires.

“The conversation around diversity, equity and inclusion. I’ve learned a lot from her in that regard as well,” Deb said. “She’s helped bring to light that people have their own challenges in so many different ways. It’s just not always mobility, but how we all find the strength to move forward and overcome some of those challenges.”



An international student from China, Tong Liu developed a unique bond with Dr. J during his seven years in Presque Isle. They had countless conversations and enjoyed many meals together, which is seen in this picture.

Chapter 6: A Bond Like No Other

Tong Liu, a recent University of Maine at Presque Isle graduate, had a unique relationship with Professor Jacqui “Dr. J” Lowman during his years at the school. As an international student from Beijing, China, Tong pursued a degree in Professional Communication and Journalism. Through classes in the PCJ program and his involvement with the nonprofit organization BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, Tong created a special bond with Dr. J, something that they still keep with them to this day.

After receiving his undergraduate degree from the PCJ program, Tong made the decision to go through graduate school. This allowed him to spend a couple more years in Presque Isle and with Dr. J. They spent seven eventful years together before his departure for China in September 2020.

Tong started his freshman year at UMPI in 2013. He began his first months at UMPI knowing very little English. He was interested in a career involving media and journalism. Tong hoped to find a job in journalism or at a news station in China after graduation. He chose the university’s PCJ program, which matched perfectly with his career aspirations.

Despite the difficulty of the PCJ program, Tong stuck with it and followed his dream of working in media. Although there had been a previous international student, Tong was the only Chinese student to go through the program.

The Professional Communication and Journalism program is a difficult major to go into. Students raised in the United States have a challenging time with the classes and English is their first language. Going into the PCJ program is most likely even more difficult for international students. The PCJ program requires a large amount of reading, writing and communication from its students. Dr. J teaches students to speak and participate during class time. Participation is a large part of a student’s work in PCJ classes. As an individual still learning English, Tong took those classes like any other student.

“When I met Dr. J, I was nervous. I was the first Chinese student in the major and you know,

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the PCJ major is hard. All of Dr. J's classes are hard and it was so difficult for international students," Tong said.

Compared to other students, Tong was able to have different experiences with Dr. J. Besides seeing each other in class, Tong was a part of the school's newspaper, University Times. Dr. J was also the advisor for the International Students Club, something Tong was involved in. They would attend these meetings together and see each other very often during the week.

At that time, the International Students Club was filled only with students from China, so Tong was able to create friendships with students from his same country. The majority of Chinese students on campus were either business or mathematics majors. Tong went through the PCJ program as the only Chinese-speaking student, something that could have been very lonely and discouraging.

"Dr. J and I were more like the child and its mother. For the international students, we didn't have parents in the United States. She was our mother at UMPI."

On their own individual time, Dr. J would meet with Tong every Friday. She would spend this time with Tong to help him with his English. Dr. J showed patience and kindness to Tong as they spent every Friday afternoon together. Learning a new language can be very intimidating, but Tong was able to improve his English every year he was at UMPI. His resilience and determination during those years allowed him to learn a new language, while receiving an education.

"Every Friday, Dr. J took the time with me to help me learn English," Tong said. "Whenever I had a problem, I would always go to her and ask her what to do. Dr. J always wanted to help me."

During these seven years together, Dr. J and Tong were able to travel and take many trips together. The trips were to all parts of the East Coast, including Washington, D.C. They were able to see the United States capital and explore the city. The two went to Rockland, Maine, for a few days to do a presentation. Dr. J and Tong travelled to the Nordic Heritage Center so that they could ski and snowboard. These trips allowed Tong to make more American friends, travel to new places, all while improving his English. These adventures also gave Tong and Dr. J quality time

together from something outside the classroom.

Traveling to these places taught Tong about accessibility and the struggles Dr. J had getting around as a person with paraplegia. Every area they went to had accessibility issues and Tong was able to help Dr. J solve problems as they travelled. Tong saw that small towns and even large cities had issues with accessibility.

“Dr. J wants every person to see her. She wants people to pay attention to everything around them,” Tong said. “When we went to Washington, D.C., she couldn’t use her wheelchair to go up stairs at hotels or restaurants. She couldn’t enter and that wasn’t good.”

Tong worked on big PCJ class projects for BEYOND LIMITS, which allowed him to work with his classmates. His classmates in PCJ were all American students, who spoke English. Tong was able to improve his English while working and communicating with his classmates.

Tong worked with his classmates for Dr. J’s Appalachian Trail Adventure in 2017. He was able to interview Al Levesque, an UMPI staff member and close friend of Dr. J’s. Al was responsible for creating Dr. J’s Jacpack, a piece of equipment he made for her so that she could travel on the trails. Tong researched and found equipment for Dr. J before she went on the trip. Tong and his classmates made maps and he worked on the BEYOND LIMITS YouTube channel. Tong was in charge of creating and posting the videos to the channel.

“Dr. J said she wanted to go on the Appalachian Trail, so we helped her with that. It was so interesting, and I enjoyed that time,” Tong said.

When Tong came to UMPI his first years, BEYOND LIMITS was still in the works. He was there when the organization started and is still a part of the organization to this day. He saw BEYOND LIMITS grow every year he was at UMPI. Tong was able to witness both the Mount Kathadin and Appalachian Trail adventures. He always supported Dr. J with her adventures, even when they seemed impossible.

“I am so happy for BEYOND LIMITS. When I first came to UMPI, BEYOND LIMITS was brand new. I have seen it from the beginning. I like that it is still helping people. BEYOND LIMITS is like my child,” Tong said.

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Tong's involvement with BEYOND LIMITS has taught him what the organization represents and what it teaches people. BEYOND LIMITS represents and embodies a good spirit. Having a good spirit and a proper amount of determination will lead people to accomplish any of their goals. People can accomplish anything they want to if they have BEYOND LIMITS' mission in mind.

"People can always make their goals and they can always be successful with BEYOND LIMITS' help," Tong said.

With classes, club meetings, and the many times they spent together on Friday nights, Tong and Dr. J's relationship became even closer after each year. Dr. J always made time for Tong and never gave up on him. She helped him with his English, which was at a very rudimentary level when he came. Tong is now a confident English speaker, which he has taken with him in his life in China.

"My favorite times with her was every Friday at UMPI when I would study and work hard with her. I am so thankful Dr. J helped me every Friday so I could learn English," Tong said. "She helped me a lot in those seven years and then through graduate school. I learned a lot from her."

Dr. J and Tong were able to form a close bond and friendship over those years together. Seven years is a long time away from home and Tong handled it well. Dr. J was a mother figure for Tong when he was in the United States. She was a mentor, a professor and a friend. The memories they created at UMPI will be something that they will carry with them forever. They are halfway around the world from each other, but are still holding those special memories close to their hearts.



For a many years, Tong (right) attended Accepted Students Day with other PCJ students and Dr. J while at UMPI.



Good friends do incredible things together and that is exactly what Mike (sitting next to Jacqui) did with Jacqui. They climbed Mount Katahdin together in 2015 during one of BEYOND LIMITS' greatest adventures.

Chapter 7: An Odd Couple of Friends

Mike Smith, a lifelong outdoor explorer and Aroostook County native, joined efforts with BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential in 2015 for a journey up Mount Katahdin. Professor Jacqui Lowman was also on that Katahdin hike, where she spent lots of time with Mike, who is now a close friend of hers. Mike has had a lasting career in recreation and is currently working at Outdoor Sports Institute, while Jacqui has continued her career as a communication professor at the University of Maine at Presque Isle. The Katahdin expedition in 2015 has been something that they continue to carry with them through their day-to-day lives.

While growing up in Aroostook County, Mike developed a love for the outdoors. As many others have in the county, Mike comes from a farming background. Living in northern Maine gave Mike many opportunities to explore the outdoors. He often went snowmobiling and rode ATVs growing up, spending as much time as he could outside. Mike went to the University of Maine at Orono and was able to expand his love for the outdoors even more. He got involved in an outdoor program at the university, which allowed him to find interests in mountain biking, canoeing, and fishing.

“I spent a lot of time outside by virtue of growing up in Aroostook County, being on a farm,” Mike said. “College really gave me opportunity to dive into new stuff. I don’t think there was a weekend or a vacation that I wasn’t off doing something. I really got to develop my skillset teaching and guiding by facilitating through a bunch of different experiences.”

Mike has continued his passion for recreation and the outdoors as he has gotten older. Whitewater paddling has been one of his favorites. He enjoys summer activities, but also utilizes his access to winter sports. Living in such an environmentally diverse state as Maine has allowed Mike to seek out every outdoor opportunity he can encounter year round. He continually travels and explores different places in the country.

“I do a lot of whitewater paddling. I love to ski, and I love to bike. I really enjoy traveling, exploring other places. I would say whitewater kayaking has been the thing I’ve done the longest

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and committed most of my resources to over the last 20 years,” Mike said.

During his time at the University of Maine, Mike traveled to the southeast and worked for an outfitter, teaching whitewater kayaking classes and raft guiding. He got the opportunity to do some international guiding in Central America. During the winter he would come home and coach the Presque Isle High School ski team. He spent his college years doing what he loved, while gaining plenty of experience and exploring possible career options.

Mike found his way back to the County when he decided to help MOJO, a bike and ski shop in Presque Isle, which is no longer there. He planned to help the company for a couple of months, but he ended up staying for longer. When he met Jacqui, Mike was working for a nonprofit, the Maine Winter Sports Center.

“The great thing about Maine Winter Sports Center was I got to travel all over the county and other parts of the state doing community development work by helping communities get ski programs or trails developed,” Mike said. “The focus of my work I think has really always been about teaching and helping people figure out how to share the love of what they’re doing with other people.”

The organization ended and, in its place, Mike helped establish the Outdoor Sports Institute. Mike is now the executive director of OSI, an outdoor leadership program that works with people who are trying to bring outdoor sports and recreation opportunities into their communities. Since the pandemic hit, he has been working remotely, developing a new curriculum and strategic plan for life after the virus.

Mike met Jacqui when she had presented at the Nordic Heritage Center. Jacqui later reached out to Mike because she was looking for a sit ski and the Maine Winter Sports Center happened to have one. When he gave Jacqui the ski, they had a long conversation about Jacqui’s plan to go whitewater rafting. The two developed a friendship over time. After some thinking, Jacqui spoke to Mike about her idea of climbing Mount Katahdin. In August 2014, Mike and a few others agreed to climb Mount Katahdin with Jacqui, Saint and BEYOND LIMITS.

Once the window for the climb was set up, everyone in the group began to prepare. As one of the six people carrying Jacqui, Mike took a leadership role by training himself and the

other “Sherpas,” the term used for the carriers. The group went through protocols and practiced carrying Jacqui. They practiced by working together to lower and raise hula hoops in order to build their teamwork and communication skills. A few weeks before the hike, the group members climbed the mountain so that they could take notes and learn the route, which further prepared them for the real thing.

“We were so fortunate in that the group of folks that agreed to help carry just had some really good natural chemistry. No one was trying to make it about themselves. Everyone was there for the right reasons. So, the group really came together very quickly, very naturally,” Mike said.

Since there were six Sherpas carrying Jacqui, the group had ten-minute rotations each hour. Anyone who wasn’t carrying Jacqui was spotting or helping the carrier through the rough terrain they were walking on. They helped one another navigate through the rocks and boulders that were on the trail. Individuals also helped carry backpacks and gear. The team was continually communicating so they would make sure that they would achieve their destination.

Everyone involved with the hike worked hard, but Jacqui’s role was the most important. Although the Sherpas were carrying her, Jacqui was ultimately being carried. Just like everyone else, Jacqui was being pushed physically and mentally. Even if Jacqui didn’t realize it, she was the leader and spirit of the group. Her positivity and confidence helped everyone all through the hike. Despite some difficulties during the hike, Jacqui was always motivating to those around her. Before the hike, she spent some time physically preparing. She used her core strength throughout the hike and had to put complete control and trust in the person who was carrying her.

“The reality is that the person that was by far doing the most work was Jacqui. I mean we got breaks,” Mike said. “She never complained. She never ever got impatient or never said a bad word. She only laughed. She only encouraged. She was only kind.”

As they approached the mountain’s summit, the group could finally see Katahdin’s signpost. The group had a gentleman with them who was a newscaster, filming and writing a story about the experience. The man had a cameraman with them as they climbed the mountain. The group was so efficient that they were moving faster than the two newscasting men due to the well-functioning system they had down.

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As they neared the summit, everyone became very focused on reaching the top. All members of the group put a hand on Jacqui so they could reach the summit as a unit. Mike could only imagine what reaching the top of the mountain would mean for Jacqui, considering her near-death experience and relationship with her father, who had helped her realize that anything is possible.

“It was a super emotional experience, I think, for everybody. I’ve been up and down the mountain in every season, in all kinds of weather. And it’s always a beautiful experience, but it’s easy to take for granted being able to do it as an able-bodied person,” Mike said.

Mike is very close with his father and Jacqui was close to hers. Mike recognizes the huge role Mr. Lowman played for his daughter. Mr. Lowman’s positive attitude and ability to always find a way continues to have an effect on Jacqui.



Jacqui sat in the Jac Pack during the Mount Katahdin climb, which is a backpack-like harness with a small seat where Jacqui sat. Pictured above is Mike (far left) and Jacqui demonstrating the Jac Pack to some students.

“She always likes to tell me that I would have really liked her dad. I think he really must have been a remarkable guy as evidenced by how remarkable Jacqui is,” Mike said. I think that’s something that really resonates about who Jacqui is, which is something that I’ve certainly gotten from my friendship with her that came through during that hike, which is her quiet tenacity.”

Through the years of their friendship, Jacqui and Mike have acknowledged some similarities

between them. Mike and Jacqui have both been on crazy and ambitious adventures during their lives. The two work so well together due to their determination and enthusiastic mindsets toward things they want to accomplish in their lives. Between the two of them, they have climbed mountains and have traveled across the country numerous times. Being a part of BEYOND LIMITS has allowed Mike to continue to make the most of his ambitious and driven personality throughout life.

Mike was able to be a part of BEYOND LIMITS in a huge way when he decided to participate in the Katahdin adventure. He understands what BEYOND LIMITS represents as an organization and the message it's trying to convey.

"Jacqui is the heart and soul of it. It represents her spirit of seeing the impossible, as not impossible," Mike said. "Its mission is to help people look past the self-limiting narratives that we carry around: because we all have them."

With BEYOND LIMITS' mission in mind, Mike believes that anyone can conquer their deepest battles. BEYOND LIMITS is for anyone who is struggling with something, whether that is physical or mental. Everyone has stories to tell and BEYOND LIMITS is that outlet for them. The organization helps people tackle all their struggles and difficulties in life. Whether someone's challenge is anxiety or driving across the country, BEYOND LIMITS is for everyone. Throughout life, Mike has always been hard on himself. BEYOND LIMITS has not only given Mike the motivation and courage to take on new adventures in his life, but also confidence in his current abilities. The organization has allowed Mike to tell his story.

The most important thing Mike has learned from his friendship with Jacqui is the importance of building relationships with people. Jacqui's ability to bond and create memories with others is something Mike admires. She is able to create a community around herself of people she loves. Thanks to the Katahdin adventure in 2015, Mike finds himself extremely lucky to be in Jacqui's life.

"Jacqui and I are an odd couple of friends. I'm 6'2 and broad shouldered. We're sort of physically the opposite of each other," Mike said. "There are times when I'm feeling down about something and then I think about her positivity and her attitude. There's nothing about Jacqui that makes you think she's sitting around feeling bad or sorry for herself."



Monica Hewitt is a PCJ graduate and during her time at the university, she became very close with Dr. J and Saint. She is pictured in the image above playing with Saint in Dr. J's home.

Chapter 8: If There's a Will, There's a Way

During Monica Hewitt's four years at the University of Maine at Presque Isle, she was able to learn and grow with her classmates as they worked with the nonprofit organization BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential. While Monica was studying Professional Communication and Journalism at UMPI, she created a close and unique relationship with her professor, Jacqui "Dr. J" Lowman. Through these experiences with Dr. J and BEYOND LIMITS, she has learned to push beyond her perceived limits and find new ways to accomplish the impossible.

Monica grew up in Caribou and was homeschooled during her entire K-12 educational experience. She explored her options, but decided to enroll in UMPI's PCJ program and started in the fall of 2014. Through lots of success and hard work, she graduated with a degree from the university in 2018.

She took her talent and communication skills to Northern Light Health, which is a health care organization across the state of Maine. Monica works as a provider recruiter for the organization. Her role as a provider recruiter requires her to find candidates for open positions that include nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and nurse anesthetists. Monica recruits for the AR Gould Hospital, which is located in Presque Isle, where she is currently living.

Before her job at AR Gould Hospital, Monica was a college student. Monica enrolled into UMPI's PCJ program due to her interest in journalism and public relations. The PCJ program was still growing when Monica enrolled, so she was able to see it develop over the years. She loved that the program was not just focused on one aspect of communication, but a variety of things. The program was versatile, and Monica was able to explore future career options in her classes.

"We did some journalism, we did some marketing, and we did some public outreach. I really liked how versatile the program was," Monica said. "I think it makes its students a lot more marketable because they have experience doing a whole bunch of different specialties in a variety of skillsets that they get to experience and play around with."

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When Monica met Dr. J, she did not know what to expect. During class time, Monica immediately noticed her professor's unique teaching style. Dr. J did not lecture like her other professors, but led class discussions and conversations instead. Monica learned that Dr. J held her students to a high standard, whether they were freshmen or seniors. Dr. J remembered all of her students' names and even spent extra time with them outside of class.

"I think she was actually the first professor that I met at UMPI. And I loved her style of teaching right away. I thought she was very engaging with her students and tough, but in the best way. I knew that she really cared about what she was teaching and wanted her students to succeed," Monica said. "I was never bored in her class. An hour and 15 minutes go by really fast with her."

Even after graduation from UMPI, Monica continues to keep in contact with Dr. J. She is no longer her professor, but it still a mentor and friend. They email back and forth throughout the year, asking each other about life updates. Monica follows BEYOND LIMITS on social media so that she can stay updated on the Dr. J's next adventure.

"I have always kind of considered her not just my professional advisor, but also a mentor and someone I could trust and someone I could kind of bounce ideas off of," Monica said.

Throughout her time in the PCJ program, Monica was able to go on small field trips around town with Dr. J. Monica and her classmates filmed a couple of Facebook Lives for BEYOND LIMITS, which allowed them to take a trip to Dr. J's house. Monica traveled with her professor to the hairdresser one day. They also delivered pet food to the local Humane Society. Monica has run errands with Dr. J on a few occasions, which allowed them to grow closer and spend time outside of class.

The trips she went on with Dr. J allowed Monica to understand accessibility and learn about the American with Disabilities Act. Her friendship with Dr. J made Monica recognize her role in society as an able-bodied person. Having Dr. J as a professor taught Monica to be more observant of and vigilant about her surroundings.

"We know she uses a wheelchair and yes, she does things differently, but she's such a pro at it

that it really doesn't seem difficult. Things might take a little bit longer to do, such as getting out of the van or maybe going up on a sidewalk," Monica said. "It's just a different way of doing things. It may not be necessarily the way we all do it, but she's done it so long that it is just a part of life. It's really cool to watch."



Monica spent many hours with Dr. J in her office working on classwork for PCJ and BEYOND LIMITS. She is pictured above during one of those occasions.

As a PCJ student at the university, Monica was able to be a part of Dr. J's organization, BEYOND LIMITS. Monica and her classmates participated in a few projects during their time. Along with Facebook Live projects, the students wrote blogs. These blogs were in the perspective of Saint, Dr. J's service dog. Saint is a huge part of the Lowman family, so it was important that the students featured her in their projects. Organizing the Facebook lives taught the PCJ students about verbal communication skills, while the blogs allowed the students to enhance their writing abilities.

A significant project that Monica and some her classmates worked on was being able to help organize BEYOND LIMITS' Appalachian Trail Adventure in 2017. The students had to research schools and make connections with them. They also contacted and recruited schools along the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine, looking for participation in the adventure. The group

also reached out to hiking clubs and recreation groups.

The PCJ program is small and inclusive, so Monica continually worked with the same classmates. She was able to create close relationships with her classmates, as well as with Dr. J. Getting to spend so much time with a small group of classmates gave Monica new experiences that she was able share with people she cared about.

“I think just every little piece was so important to the mission of the project and what we were doing. When we would do the Facebook Lives, we would get together and share everyone’s experiences or stories. I think it was the teamwork and amount of collaboration that went into everything. That is what made our time together special,” Monica said.

Working with BEYOND LIMITS has affected the way Monica looks at life since graduation. In school, she quickly learned BEYOND LIMITS’ mission and what the organization is trying to teach. As a past student of Dr. J’s, Monica realized that everything she teaches in class is embodied in BEYOND LIMITS’ message.

“I think I learned early on that ‘can’t’ is really not an option. There’s always a way to do something, even if it isn’t the traditional way. There’s always a modification to be made or a way to kind of work around that,” Monica said. “So, I kind of just learned to take a step back, even if something looks difficult or it doesn’t look like it can be done.”

When Monica was a student early on in her career, BEYOND LIMITS was still developing. The organization was continuing to build and they were still deciding on a name during that time. Faculty, staff, and community members came together with students to continue BEYOND LIMITS’ growth. Students helped with connections and website content, while a staff member created a carrying device for Dr. J to use on her recreation adventures. Dr. J was able to bring a diverse group of people together. BEYOND LIMITS was becoming a widely known organization and Monica was a part of it. Many people were involved with building the organization, which is something Monica admired from the start.

BEYOND LIMITS is an organization that is unique to everyone who comes across it. All people involved with BEYOND LIMITS take something away from it, depending on their role.

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Everyone interprets the organization's message differently, but Monica sees it bigger than just recreation based. BEYOND LIMITS is so much more than climbing mountains and conquering difficult recreational activities. Although climbing mountains and hiking trails is difficult, the organization is limitless in its opportunities.

"It's not specifically about outdoor recreation or physical disabilities. You don't have to have a physical challenge or a mental challenge," Monica said. "You can always apply the mission and the ideas from BEYOND LIMITS to whatever you're doing. Which is, I think, why it resonates with everyone."

Building a relationship with Dr. J is something that Monica holds close to her. Dr. J has affected Monica's life in many ways. Monica has learned to never back down from a challenge, even if it seems daunting at times. Monica reminds herself that she should never be afraid to ask for help because no one knows all the answers in life. Dr. J taught Monica how to be a team player and what it takes to collaborate with others. Dr. J taught her lessons and skills that she will be able to use as she continues to grow into a better person, as we all do in life.

"She's impacted my life in a lot of ways. She's taught me to be a better communicator and how to be a better writer. I think the biggest lesson she taught me is to always find a way to do something. She taught me to never say you 'can't,' because there is a way to do it, even if you can't do it by yourself," Monica said.



Joann Silverberg is an old friend and professor of Jacqui's. She has helped Jacqui with her education, personal life and she is pictured above.

Chapter 9: Sibyl in the Bottle

Retired educator and world traveler, Joann Silverberg taught thousands of students during her 40-year teaching career, including Professor Jacqui Lowman. Jacqui, the founder of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, quickly blossomed a friendship with her professor, Joann. After multiple decades of friendship and life-altering events, the two are still close.

Joann spent four decades educating and traveling the world from her passion for languages and Greek culture. She grew up in New York City with a devotion to her education ever since she was little. She went on to Barnard College for her bachelor's degree and Radcliffe College for her master's degree. Joann earned her Ph.D. from Harvard University and took a job as a professor at Sweet Briar College, before going to Connecticut College. She would meet Jacqui at Connecticut College during her 40-year career there. Before Joann was a professor, she was just a girl who dreamed of being a teacher.

Education and learning have always been a priority for Joann. Her mother kindled those learning experiences teaching Joann how to read. Her mother had a certificate in early childhood education, and she spent a great deal of time with Joann as a child. She would use cards with vocabulary words on them and help her daughter learn. These moments were very special for Joann. She even recalls the dress her mother used to wear during their teaching lessons.

“It was a navy blue dress with white polka dots and a white lace collar. I thought that was the most exciting thing. So, I guess I always wanted to be a teacher,” Joann said. “I think my motivation was I just loved learning. I was excited about it and I wanted to share it. And Jacqui was a really good person to share it with. She had that same love.”

Joann was able to live her dream and become an educator. When Jacqui was starting at Connecticut College, Joann was notified. Jacqui was returning to college after her father's death during her stay in Athens for a study abroad program. After many years, Jacqui was ready to go back to school and nothing was going to stand in her way. Joann's department chair told her that

there was a woman coming and that she should be nice to her.

“That struck me as very odd, like why wouldn’t I be nice to her? Was he being against that I should somehow be prejudiced against her because she was not the traditional undergraduate? I always thought that it said more about him than me,” Joann said.

When Jacqui started at Connecticut College, she was taking a few of Joann’s courses, which were not easy. Jacqui was also working and taking care of her mother. During that time, Joann was developing a friendship with Jacqui and often confided in her about her own struggles. Joann now feels guilty about this, since she knew of Jacqui’s difficulties. Jacqui was a friend to her professor, even when she was juggling a lot in her life.

As Jacqui went to class and received an education, she struggled physically. When Joann knew her, Jacqui was not as physically disabled as she would later be. Jacqui was also not diagnosed yet. She struggled with her handwriting and opening doors to buildings. Joann was there to support her and make sure she got the education she deserved.

“She was early on an advocate for having handicap access and electronic door opening,” Joann said. “And as her physical condition deteriorated, we maintained that attitude. I think that is the thing we share in our friendship, which is that positive attitude and can-do attitude toward life.”

Joann quickly noticed that Jacqui was different from her other students. Jacqui was a very conscientious person and a wonderful listener. She would remember the small things Joann would say in her lectures or in her office. The two women were able to bond and start a friendship that would last for many years to come. Jacqui was a unique student and Joann is grateful that she had her in the classroom.

“It was a joy. She would remember all sorts of things that I said that I had totally forgotten that I had said. So, she was always a special student,” Joann said.

It has been decades since their friendship started and many things have changed in their lives. Joann retired in 2007 and Jacqui is currently a professor at the University of Maine at Presque Isle. Their lives are very different, but their friendship is still strong. Joann has made

the point to visit Jacqui wherever she goes in life. Joann has visited Jacqui in various parts of the country including Chicago, Michigan and North Dakota. Joann has even visited Jacqui in northern Maine when she got her position at UMPI. Despite all the changes in their lives, the two women are still bonded from their time together in Connecticut.

“She is one of a handful of former students who became a lifelong friend. And that’s very special to me,” Joann said.

Joann has travelled the world for many years and through that time she has been able to learn about accessibility. Her friendship with Jacqui has allowed her to learn more about disabilities and living with them. As someone who is in her 80s and living with two knee replacements, Joann has learned the importance of accessibility. When Joann travels, she often examines her surroundings and tries to see things from someone else’s point of view. She has thought of what it must be like for Jacqui to travel in a wheelchair.

“She has to think ahead of everything. And even then, she encounters some difficulties. It’s a constant battle for her,” Joann said. “I think having wonderful dogs is helpful. She is educating people all the time.”

Jacqui has gone on many adventures for BEYOND LIMITS this past decade and Joann has supported her through it all. The Appalachian Trail Adventure in 2017 and the Back to the Roots Journey in 2019 are two events that have stuck out to Joann. She realized how difficult it might have been to navigate the Appalachian Trail as a person with paraplegia. Joann has thought about the troubles Jacqui might have gone through during her trip across the country. Joann has always been impressed with Jacqui and her courage when taking on an adventure.

During Jacqui’s BEYOND LIMITS’ adventures, Joann has discovered the meaning of the trips. Jacqui’s various adventures with the organization have allowed her to do more than just cross things off her bucket list. Jacqui has been able to educate and influence every person around her. Each encounter she has allows her to teach people about accessibility. Every adventure she conquers gives others the inspiration to tackle their own battles.

Joann has been able to witness every one of Jacqui’s adventures with BEYOND LIMITS.

Going Beyond Their Limits: The People Behind the Organization

Long phone calls with Jacqui allow Joann to find out what is new with BEYOND LIMITS. Joann believes that Jacqui is the embodiment of BEYOND LIMITS and everything it stands for. As a longtime supporter of the organization, Joann is always excited to see what Jacqui has planned for her next adventure.

As their lives change, Jacqui and Joann still keep up with their unique friendship. The two women have always been able to joke around with one another, even in hard times. Despite the difficulties in their lives, Joann and Jacqui always know how to find the humor in situations. They have lived very different and transformative lives, but their sense of humor has never changed. Having a friend like Joann has been wonderful for Jacqui, since there are a few people in her life who struggle to have faith in her.

“I like her. I enjoy her company,” Joann laughed. “I enjoy her attitude on life. And I can say things to her, and they are meant as a joke and she takes them as a joke.”

Joann was able to meet many of Jacqui’s family members. The Lowman family was built of many personalities. Jacqui and her father were very similar. He was always someone who would push Jacqui to be the best person she could be. Mr. Lowman knew Jacqui was different and he told her to embrace that. Jacqui’s mother and sister were similar to each other and they wanted to protect Jacqui in everything she did. Jacqui has always gone beyond her perceived limits by challenging the impossible. Joann recognizes that and has always supported Jacqui in her endeavors, which is something not everyone has done.

“Jacqui doesn’t need protecting,” Joann said. “I just was always sort of the counterbalance to her family who was worried about what would happen to her if she took a chance. Because I take chances.”

Jacqui’s spirit and attitude have always reminded Joann of Sibyl, a prophetess of a Greek Legend. This ancient myth tells the story of a powerful woman who could tell the future. After a great deal of time, she wasted away and the only thing that was left was her voice. She grew very small and she was even tiny enough to fit in a bottle. Despite the changes, she still had a prophetic voice. Joann feels that this Greek myth resembles Jacqui and everything she has been through.

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“Even if she is physically challenged, physically diminished, she still has the strong voice and a lust to live and to teach other people how to live,” Joann said. “She didn’t have to teach me something that went against my own nature. But she let me see that even though I’m 80 years old, that attitude is what keeps you alive.”

Jacqui and Joann have a special relationship, which is something they both cherish. They have dedicated a large portion of their lives to educating and influencing others. Jacqui was able to take what she learned from Joann and apply it to her teaching. They are a unique pair, and their relationship is something that Joann is eternally grateful for.

“She’s just one of a handful of students that makes me feel that my life as an educator was worthwhile,” Joann said.



Al Levesque is a locksmith, a carpenter and a key contributor to BEYOND LIMITS. He is a good friend of Jacqui's and has used his wide range of skills to help BEYOND LIMITS with its adventures. He has had many great conversations with Jacqui like the one pictured above.

Chapter 10: The View From the Top

Handyman and builder extraordinaire, Al Levesque is a University of Maine at Presque Isle facility worker and longtime friend of Jacqui Lowman's. As a supporter of Jacqui's nonprofit, BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, Al has spent years dedicating his time and skills to the organization. Al has improved Jacqui's overall life due to his handiwork on campus, in her home and for BEYOND LIMITS. Al has been a key contributor to BEYOND LIMITS' success and through that time he was able to find a friend in Jacqui.

Al is 62 years old and has been at UMPI for 10 years as a locksmith and carpenter. He is also a fond outdoorsman and likes to spend a large portion of his time with nature. Al enjoys hunting and fishing, whether that is in the great north Quebec woods or other areas. He also dedicated 30 years of his life as a scout master, which gave him the opportunity to share his knowledge with younger boys. Giving back to the those around him has always been a foundational part of Al's life.

For most of his life, Al was in the construction and building trades. For an additional 18 years, Al was in the custodial and janitorial system, so he spent most of his time trying to keep people clean and healthy. Al did a lot of research through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention when the Avian flu broke out years ago. Due to his experience and research, the COVID-19 pandemic was something Al was familiar with.

Al met Jacqui in 2011 when he first started at the university. She was having a few issues around campus and needed help from Al. He thought that Jacqui was a little demanding during his first encounter with her. After that conversation, Al realized that she wasn't demanding at all. Jacqui needed something done and Al was the person who could help. Jacqui knew what she needed and she was not going to stop until she got it.

"She had a different way of asking because she was assertive. And I enjoyed that because with assertiveness comes clarity," Al said.

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After Al started to help Jacqui with some projects around campus, their friendship started to blossom. Their personalities complemented each other well and Al recognized that. Jacqui gave Al many challenges to overcome and he never shied away from them. Jacqui and Al are very different people, who have their own special talents. Jacqui is a college professor and Al is a carpenter. They are both very successful in their lines of work, but that doesn't mean they don't have their own struggles.

"We're human beings and everybody's got their strengths. And sometimes their strengths are not as strong as somebody else's," Al said. "She gives me challenges and I enjoy a challenge, so I enjoy Jacqui."

Later on, in their friendship, Jacqui decided she wanted to climb Mount Katahdin as part of an adventure for BEYOND LIMITS. She asked Al for assistance and he did not hesitate to help his friend. Al had climbed Mount Katahdin many times and knew of its beauty. Al knew of Jacqui's paraplegia and the difficulties that would come along with climbing a 5,000-foot mountain. Al wanted to provide Jacqui with anything that she might have needed for the hike, but he knew that the climb would be difficult.

"I will share anything that I have; anything. You want the shirt off of my back. But there's things that I can't share. I could not give her my legs," Al said.

Al was aware of Jacqui's abdominal aortic aneurysm in 2012 and knew the importance of climbing Mount Katahdin for her. She could have died from the aneurysm, so Al wanted to help her achieve this adventure. Al knew what it was like to climb Katahdin and he wanted Jacqui to see the view from the top, as he had.

After Jacqui's successful Katahdin climb in 2015, she decided she wanted to hike the Appalachian Trail. Jacqui knew of Al's carpentry skills and how he could help. With Jacqui's optimism and Al's skills, the two worked together to create the "Jac Pack." This invention would be used by Jacqui and the Sherpas, who carried Jacqui on the Appalachian Trail. The Jac Pack is a backpack-like harness with a small seat where Jacqui sat during the climb. Al created the Jac Pack and also contributed to other inventions for various BEYOND LIMITS' adventures throughout the years. Without Al's creativity and contribution to BEYOND LIMITS, Jacqui may have not

successfully hiked parts of the Appalachian Trail.

“She provided the fuel and the need to get up there and I just stoked the firewood a little,” Al said. “We keep going and growing every year. And here we are ten years later, still impacting people.”

Many years ago, Jacqui was having some trouble in her home. She could no longer take care of her mother as she wanted to, and she was struggling with accessibility in her home. Al stepped up and made the decision to help Jacqui gain her independence back.

“Taking care of herself was becoming really problematic. Her environment wasn’t there. She told me what we needed to do, and we made it happen. We made her home accessible,” Al said.

Al has spent many years working on Jacqui’s home. Through many projects over the decade, Al has improved Jacqui’s mobility and overall way of living. He built a ramp for Jacqui, so she can enter her kitchen from her garage. Al reinvented Jacqui’s kitchen so she can use it. Every part of the kitchen is completely accessible to Jacqui, including the stove, sink, the dish washer and cabinets. The oven door opens from its side and the upper cabinets come down to the counter, so Jacqui can reach them. Al designed the kitchen so that anyone can use it, including Jacqui. He wanted the kitchen to look beautiful regardless of its differences.

“I didn’t want to build that persona of an institution in her house. I wanted to make it a home,” Al said. “It doesn’t look like it belongs to a specific group. Everybody can use it. It doesn’t make anybody feel out of place or special. There’s a lot of thought that went into it and it all came from Jacqui. I just put the tape measure to it and made it work.”

Designing Jacqui’s home was very important to Al because he could relate to the situation. In 1991, Al was paralyzed from the waist down. He had no control of his bowel movements or urination. He was told that he would probably never work again. After some time, Al was able to make a full recovery. Al knew the importance of having an accessible home and he wanted to help Jacqui in every way he could.

“Many people have been to Jacqui’s house and have seen how she’s adapted. She is utilizing the home as a teaching tool, which is great. I feel that my part, even without certification and

without degrees, I've been able to let others learn," Al said.

Al's friendship with Jacqui has given him many opportunities to reflect on his life and family. He is the second youngest child of 15 children. Al made his family proud when he was the first one to graduate from high school. Before even graduating, Al knew that he was going straight to work. He never had the intention of furthering his education and it has been his biggest regret in life.

Although Al did not further his education after high school, he has still lived a successful and rewarding life. Al learned to be a locksmith and carpenter. He regrets his decision not to go to college but is thankful for his current position in life.

"When somebody says 'Al, you're a failure,' they're absolutely right. But look at my success," Al said. "If you fail, that means you attempted and you learned something. Failure is success. You cannot be successful without failure."

Al's friendship with Jacqui has taught him the importance of accessibility on UMPI's campus. Through his work in Jacqui's house, he has been able to transition that work onto UMPI's campus. As a member of the facilities department, Al has worked on many projects throughout campus. He has worked to make dormitories and athletic buildings on campus accessible for the UMPI community and the rest of the public. There has been a lot of progress made on campus, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

His job in facilities and projects done for Jacqui have allowed Al to learn about the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The ADA has taught Al about the laws that prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities on university campuses or other state buildings.

"I wish that every building on campus would be ADA compliant because who are we to deprive anybody of going to UMPI?" Al said. "There's room for improvement, but we're doing real good compared to some other campuses."

Al's relationship with BEYOND LIMITS has given him many opportunities. His work for the organization allowed him to grow closer with Jacqui and use his creativity to build amazing inventions. Jacqui has challenged Al in every aspect of their relationship. She pushes him to be

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the best version of himself. When Jacqui wanted to climb Mount Katahdin, Al did everything he could to help. He wanted Jacqui to be able to see the view from the top. They are very different from each other, but what they share is a love for friendship and BEYOND LIMITS.

“I’ve been this type of individual most of my life. I’ve always enjoyed sharing what I have and having fun with it and making sure that people can have the same fun. That hasn’t changed with my friend, Jacqui,” Al said.



Hopper (second from the right) is a friend of Jacqui's who hiked parts of the Appalachian Trail with her after meeting her at a conference a few years ago. In the image above, they are seen together with the entire hiking group right before they started in Virginia.

Chapter 11: Leaders of the Pack

An avid backpacker and lover of the outdoors, Hopper, who is known by her trail name, contributed to Professor Jacqui Lowman's nonprofit organization, BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential. Throughout 2017, Hopper, Jacqui and several others hiked portions of the Appalachian Trail as part of the organization's next adventure. During their time together, they developed a friendship, completed difficult parts of the Appalachian Trail and inspired others to push beyond their perceived limits.

Hopper enjoys moving around a lot, but she currently resides in Virginia. She is a substitute teacher, which allows her to take off periods of time to go hiking whenever she would like. She substitutes for a Catholic school and also works for a public school district.

Hopper was raised in Kentucky and earned her bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation from Murray State University. She had originally gone to college to be a special education teacher. When she arrived on campus, she had learned that her university cancelled the program. She changed her major to therapeutic recreation after realizing her passion for helping people who are physically different. Hopper loved adapting things for people who may have been born uniquely.

"I had a career working with Easter Seals camps and so I knew that I wanted to work with people that were disabled in some way, shape or form," Hopper said. "So, therapeutic recreation was a great way to take care of that."

Recreation and physical activity have always been a big part of Hopper's life. Whether she is playing an outdoor game or working in her yard, she is in her element. She has participated in organized sports and has even downhill skied, but her love has always been for backpacking. Hiking and backpacking are her idea of relaxing, but working hard at it.

"Well, I've always liked to play. I loved recess at school," Hopper said. "I could always get a whole group of kindergarten kids to follow me around on a playground. Recreation has always been a big aspect of my life."

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Hopper met Jacqui when Jacqui was giving a presentation at the Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association's annual gathering in 2015. During her presentation, Jacqui spoke about her recent adventure climbing Mount Katahdin. Jacqui was looking to hike parts of the Appalachian Trail and was recruiting people who might be interested. Hopper was at the event and was sitting next to some friends from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Hopper was looking around the room during Jacqui's presentation and she noticed a friend from the ATC shaking her head "no." And yet, another ATC friend and hiker in attendance, and he was shaking his head at Hopper saying, "Yes, you can do this."

"I was looking at the lady from the ATC and she is saying 'no' and I'm saying 'yes,'" Hopper said. "Anytime I see that you're telling someone that they can't do something, then I'm going to step in and say, 'Hey, yes, yes you can.'"

Hopper observed the mixed opinions of the audience members. She knew this was something she had to do. She saw Jacqui's determination and Hopper felt that she could help Jacqui, due to her experience on the trails. Hopper gave Jacqui her phone number and looked forward to a hopeful future together on the trails.

Hopper was inspired by BEYOND LIMITS and everything Jacqui had done prior, so she became fully devoted to the organization's next adventure. She had hiked the Appalachian Trail several times and knew she could be helpful to Jacqui. She had lots of hiking experience and her degree in therapeutic recreation would be beneficial to Jacqui. Hopper had worked with people with disabilities before and she knew how to properly adapt hiking gear.

There were many people who told Hopper that she could not do this. Every time someone doubted Jacqui or the hike, Hopper became even more motivated to do it. She examined the hike and determined that they could complete the hike, but that it would be a little different. They could successfully hike parts of the Appalachian Trail, but they would have to do it at a different pace. They would need to work harder than other hiking groups, but Hopper was confident that they could do it.

"I had close friends telling me that she could not do this--backpacking friends," Hopper said. "We could go hiking. We just had to get past that mental break. We just had to modify in different

ways. That's all."

Jacqui and Hopper did a large amount of preparation before the first hike in Georgia. Hopper examined Jacqui's initial gear list. She determined that the list needed to be adjusted. Jacqui planned to have group meals during the hike, but Hopper felt that those group meals wouldn't work. Jacqui has special dietary needs, and the rest of the group would need to eat other things. The two women also looked at their backpacks and everything that would need to go into them. Controlling the weight of backpacks was extremely important for the people who were carrying them.

Hopper traveled to Jacqui's home so that they could do some more preparation. She took a look at Jacqui's tent and cooking supplies. They blew up an air mattress, then set up her cot and tent inside her living room. After setting up everything, Hopper told Jacqui to sleep there that night.

"I wanted to see how determined she was. Sleeping in a tent in your living room is completely different than sleeping in a tent in the woods," Hopper said. "But, she was willing to do it. In the morning, she beat me into the kitchen while I was sleeping in bed."

They continued to make adjustments to the gear list. Hopper had Jacqui weigh each item, so that she knew how much others would be carrying for her. After completing each hike, they were able to determine what they didn't end up needing or what they might need for future hikes. Hopper wanted to do everything she could to give Jacqui the full experience, despite the changes.

"My whole thinking was that she needed to be safe. She needed to get the full experience as safely as possible, and then everyone else that was assisting in this also had to be safe," Hopper said.

The women hiked parts of the Appalachian Trail with a different group every time. They hiked with students and a professor from Clemson University. Those students had little backpacking experience. Students and a professor from Murray State University also hiked with the women. The Murray State group had some backpacking experience, so the hike was not as challenging. Hopper was not only guiding Jacqui, but some of the students who needed extra

assistance.

Jacqui was the heart of the group, but Hopper also had to take on some leadership roles. Throughout the hikes, Hopper helped the students with any needs they had. Hopper's backpacking experience was extremely helpful for the group as they navigated the trails.

"I did not want to be a leader. I gave suggestions and they'd always follow them," Hopper said. "Jacqui was the one that was in charge. She was the focal point."

Jacqui and Hopper were able to help the entire group, while still enjoying their time on the hikes. Hopper worked with Jacqui so that she could still be independent and enjoy herself. At night, Hopper helped Jacqui set up her tent and prepare food. During the hikes, Jacqui and Hopper talked with the students and developed close bonds with them.

"There was a lot of supervision of the kids when they didn't know what they were doing and helping them because they didn't want to listen to their professor. And I was the crazy blonde that knew a lot," Hopper said.

Hopper became a mother figure to the group during the hikes. She monitored their health and looked for signs of hypothermia when they were hiking in Georgia during the winter. Her experience with backpacking allowed her to always be helpful to the group.

The hikes were not always fun and exciting, which is something Hopper felt at times. During their Georgia hike, Hopper had some friends meet up with them at a road crossings every day. There were many points during the hike that Hopper felt overwhelmed.

"I took one of them to the side and I just cried in her arms because I was so stressed," Hopper said. "It was a stressful experience, but it was a good experience because Jacqui learned from it and everybody in the group learned from it."

Hopper knew how difficult it would be to hike parts of the Appalachian Trail, so she constantly monitored Jacqui's health. She watched for signs of hypothermia and made sure she was eating enough. Hopper was aware of Jacqui and her mental toughness. Hiking the trails was strenuous for Jacqui, who was sitting on someone's back the whole time. Jacqui never complained

Chapter 11: Leaders of the Pack

“Backpacking is not easy. There are some people that will start the Appalachian Trail and they will quit in Georgia and they will quit in Georgia and they will quit the first day,” Hopper said. “Jacqui didn’t quit. She put her body through a lot of ups and downs.”

As they finished the hikes, Hopper felt a sense of accomplishment for the group. She had many people saying that they couldn’t complete these hikes, so it was a feeling of achievement. Hopper knew that Jacqui wanted to do more of the trail, but was content with the progress that they had made.

“We had so many people saying that we couldn’t do it, so there was that sense of accomplishment at the end,” Hopper said. “I was happy that we had done it and I would gladly go out and do it with her again.”



In the image above, there is Jacqui, Hopper (on the far left) and the other members of the hiking group near the end of a trail.

The two women still stay in touch since finishing the Appalachian Trail Adventures. They email and text each other frequently. She tries to visit Jacqui when Hopper volunteers at a hostel in southern Maine during hiker season, which is from July to October. She has gone to visit Jacqui

many times in northern Maine. When Jacqui got Dusty, her service dog, Hopper visited them.

Her time with BEYOND LIMITS has taught Hopper the importance of the organization. She looks at BEYOND LIMITS as an interesting experiment to get a group of people together for a common goal. She loves that the organization can bring a diverse group of people together for something greater than themselves.

“That’s my idea of what BEYOND LIMITS is, which is bringing a group of people together, to show them that they can achieve something together. I think that’s the best thing and our world needs more of that,” Hopper said.

Jacqui has taught Hopper about physicality and that there is no one idea of being “normal.” Hopper has worked with many people with disabilities in the past. She has always admired their courageousness and mental toughness. Working with people with disabilities has left a mark on Hopper and the way she sees herself.

“Jacqui does inspire me a lot because of her willingness to physically put herself out there,” Hopper said. “I used to think when I was younger, if something happened to my legs, I wouldn’t want to live. And I have changed that thinking over the years.”

Hopper feels that Jacqui and she are similar in their stubbornness. The two women led a group of hikers along difficult parts of the Appalachian Trail, which is hard to do. She admires Jacqui’s determination and ability to constantly challenge herself. The Appalachian Trail Adventures gave Hopper the chance to be a part of BEYOND LIMITS while gaining a close friend in Jacqui. They have continued their friendship outside of hiking and look forward to their next adventure together.

“It’s her perseverance and determination,” Hopper said. “It doesn’t matter what other people think, but it is what you think about yourself. You can always keep pushing forward regardless of what other people think because you can always do more than what they think you could do.”



When Jacqui got her second service dog, Dusty, Hopper stayed with her during the first night. Here is Hopper petting Saint at the hotel where they were staying.



Alyssa Sinclair (left) is a PCJ graduate who studied under Dr. J during college. She worked on a few projects for BEYOND LIMITS, which included making merchandise for the organization, seen in the image above.

Chapter 12: I Couldn't Have Done It Without Her

Alyssa Sinclair, a University of Maine at Presque Isle graduate, recently spent four life-changing years in college working with Professor Jacqui Lowman and her nonprofit organization BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential. Jacqui's insight and guidance helped Alyssa grow as a person and communicator during such a pivotal time in her life.

Alyssa, a 22-year-old, started her journey at UMPI in 2016. She majored in English with a concentration in Professional Communication and Journalism, where she met Dr. J, who is the head of the program. Later on, in her college career, Alyssa decided to minor in Graphic Design, which complements the communication field well.

As many students do, Alyssa went through high school not knowing what major she wanted to study. She considered various career fields. At different points in time, she wanted to be a school psychologist and a teacher. When she was a freshman in high school, she had the opportunity to go to a global competition for a club she was in. At the competition, she was introduced to a keynote speaker, who sparked a new interest in her.

"He was a photographer at "National Geographic." He kind of drew me into the journalism world. When I first started college, I wanted to go into photojournalism, which has definitely changed over the years. But, that was the main reason I went into PCJ.

She met Dr. J and her service dog, Saint, during UMPI's Accepted Students Day. Alyssa immediately noticed her future professor's confidence and positive attitude. Alyssa had more interactions with Dr. J during her freshman year in University Times meetings. She got to know Dr. J and was introduced to BEYOND LIMITS, which is something that would be a huge part of her life in a couple of years.

"I admired her right away. She was really my first experience with somebody in a wheelchair and with service dogs," Alyssa said. "As I took classes with her, went to University Times meetings and spent more time with her, the admiration definitely grew more and more. I learned more

about her journey and the things that she and Saint had gone through.”

Alyssa moved to Orono in July 2020, looking for a fresh start right out of college. She was recently hired as an Assignment Editor for WABI, a news company that serves central and eastern Maine.

After spending four years in the PCJ program, Alyssa was fully prepared to start her new job at WABI. For her new position, she was asked to use the “Associated Press Stylebook.” PCJ students use the AP Stylebook in all their classes with Dr. J, so Alyssa had a head start. Students in the program also get to focus their class projects to fit their interests, whether that is social media, graphic design or writing.

“I was able to do a lot of stuff with social media and websites, which actually is a very big part of my job now,” Alyssa said. “It was really good to have that experience of running a Facebook page and knowing how social media work when you’re managing it for a professional business or anything like that.”

During Alyssa’s senior year, she dealt with a lot of difficulties in her personal life. She grew a lot closer with Dr. J, who always was there to support her. At one point in the school year, Alyssa had three classes with Dr. J. They spent many hours together on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dr. J, Alyssa and another PCJ senior, Tiffany Smith, became very close-knit that year.

“She was basically my therapist. Throughout most of my senior year, I was going through a lot of really tough times and I wouldn’t have gotten through it without her,” Alyssa said. “She was always the first person I went to whenever something happened or whenever I needed somebody to talk to.”

Dr. J, Alyssa and Tiffany were planning on an end-of-the-school-year trip to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 2020. It was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so they had to improvise. The three women drove to Fort Kent and went to the America’s First Mile monument. They had lunch at the Swamp Buck. Alyssa and Tiffany got some footage of Saint and Dusty, Dr. J’s second service dog. They capped off their adventurous day by getting something to eat at Gram Russo’s in Presque Isle.

Chapter 12: I Couldn't Have Done It Without Her

Throughout the day, Alyssa got to see Dr. J maneuver around Aroostook County. Alyssa had never known anyone in a wheelchair before, so it was interesting seeing Dr. J drive her van, Miracle. Dr. J showed her two students how she got into the van and drove it. Alyssa sat with the service dogs in the back of the van and got to experience a car ride with their professor.

“It was really cool seeing how it was accommodated and how she was able to drive,” Alyssa said. “When we drove to Fort Kent, I spent a lot of time on the dog couch. It was really nice sitting in the dog couch and seeing how the dogs did in the car, too.”

Alyssa and Tiffany chose to work together on a BEYOND LIMITS documentary for their senior project. During that school year, they traveled with Dr. J around town to collect footage for their video. The two students were able to see Dr. J at her favorite spots in Presque Isle. They went to Grave's Shop 'N' Save, so that Dr. J could pick up some groceries. Alyssa interviewed a store employee, Penny, while Tiffany filmed. They noticed how caring and accommodating Penny and the other employees were to Dr. J. The trio also went to Percy's Auto Sales because Dr. J needed some work done on the van. Alyssa and Tiffany even went to the hairdresser with Dr. J. Every time they traveled around town, they noticed something about Dr. J and the places she went.

“She goes to a lot of places that are small businesses and locally owned, so everyone knows each other. There is always some sort of community feeling when you're with her. That's one of the nice things about her living where she is now,” Alyssa said.

One of Alyssa's favorite shooting locations was at the veterinarian's, when the service dogs visited Dr. Hotham. Alyssa loved seeing Saint and Dusty in an environment with other animals. She noticed how excited the dogs were to see Dr. Hotham because he always gave them their favorite treats when they visited.

“It was really fun going everywhere and seeing the community that Dr. J has built for herself and the dogs in these places that she goes to,” Alyssa said.

Alyssa had many adventures around Presque Isle with Dr. J. She got to learn about accessibility and the problems that Dr. J sometimes has to deal with on a daily basis. Alyssa admires Dr. J's patience during difficult situations. She recalls many scenarios when Dr. J had

trouble accessing things. Alyssa remembers when Dr. J was traveling in Pennsylvania and she booked a hotel room that was meant to be accessible, but it wasn't. During an UMPI academic awards ceremony, Dr. J couldn't go on stage because there was not a ramp for her. Alyssa notices that Dr. J never gets upset in those situations because she is always ready to solve a problem. Dr. J is also never afraid to ask for help, which is a trait Alyssa admires.

As Alyssa and Tiffany finished their senior year, they also wrapped up their documentary. Tiffany captured all the footage from the semester and finished up the last minute edits. Alyssa was the main interviewer in the project. She scheduled the interviews and organized the project. Alyssa also spent time updating the BEYOND LIMITS' website. She added information about Dusty, who was not on the site yet. Alyssa handled the social media aspects of the project and posted on the organization's Instagram and Facebook pages, promoting the documentary's release.

"I was the main interviewer. Whenever we interviewed somebody in the documentary, I was the one that asked the questions," Alyssa said. "My other big part of the documentary was the social media side of things."

The two students finished their project and virtually graduated in May 2020 during the height of the pandemic. Since then, Alyssa has been able to reflect on her PCJ career and everything that she has accomplished. One of the most important aspects of college for Alyssa was spending time with Dr. J. There are multiple things that Dr. J has done in her life that have inspired Alyssa. She was able to witness Dr. J travel across the country and then back through Canada. She thought that trip would have been hard for anyone, let alone someone in a wheelchair. She loved seeing Dr. J do so many astonishing things and she truly enjoyed being able to share her story through the documentary.

"Over the course of the school year, the documentary had such a big impact on me. It completely changed me as a person because it brought me out of my comfort zone," Alyssa said. "I learned so much about Dr. J, the girls and her entire life. I learned how she functions on a day-to-day basis and how she's made her life into what it is today."

Alyssa has also been able to see BEYOND LIMITS' growth over the years. She loves that she

Chapter 12: I Couldn't Have Done It Without Her

and other PCJ students are getting to share Dr. J's story through class projects. Alyssa has worked on many projects for BEYOND LIMITS and has been able to spread the organization's message through her work.

"It makes me really happy to see BEYOND LIMITS' growth because I know how pure the intentions are behind it. It's such a great message to send out. It's something that everybody needs to know and everybody needs to hear," Alyssa said. "I think that our website and our social media pages are a great way to show that to people."

Through her classes and time with Dr. J, Alyssa has learned what BEYOND LIMITS represents. Alyssa recognizes that BEYOND LIMITS' message is powerful and that it should be shared with everyone who encounters it.

"This organization really is an extension of who Dr. J is. That's really the big message that she wants to push to people, which is to not limit yourself because you think you can't do it. Follow your dreams and know that anything is possible," Alyssa said. "I really think that bravery, perseverance and strength is a big part of what BEYOND LIMITS represents."

Dr. J has been one of the most influential people in Alyssa's life. Having her professor's friendship is something very special to Alyssa and something she hopes to keep as she moves on from UMPI. Dr. J was a professor, friend and during Alyssa's senior year, pretty much a therapist for her. Alyssa's years at UMPI were difficult, and she wouldn't have gotten through them if it weren't for Dr. J.

"Dr. J is truly a remarkable woman with or without her disability. She has done a lot and accomplished a lot in her life," Alyssa said. "It makes me really happy to see that people are learning about Dr. J, Saint and Dusty's story through our work with BEYOND LIMITS."



Tiffany grew very close with Dr. J while she was a student at UMPI. Tiffany traveled to Washington, D.C., for a University Times trip, where she is pictured above.

Chapter 13: Finding BEYOND LIMITS' Essence Through Her Lens

While attending the University of Maine at Presque Isle, Tiffany Smith studied under Professor Jacqui “Dr. J” Lowman, who is also the founder of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential. During her time in college, Tiffany kindled a friendship with her professor, developed a passion for videography and without even knowing it at the time, had some of the best years of her life.

Tiffany graduated from UMPI in May of 2020 during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the constant struggles of that year, she was able to finish her classes and successfully graduate. Tiffany graduated with a degree in Professional Communication and Journalism.

Tiffany is currently a Direct Support Professional for Living Innovations, where she supports and assists people with intellectual challenges. Tiffany spends a large portion of her job going to homes and out into the community to help people improve their quality of life. She also has her own videography business called Tiffany Ash Videography, which is one of her greatest joys in life.

Before she even started college, Tiffany already enjoyed photography. Throughout college, she learned that she could use videography and photography skills in PCJ. She loved that photography gave her the chance to express herself artistically through visuals.

“It’s probably my biggest creative outlet. I like to do a lot of things. I like plants. I like outdoors. I like dogs. But videography and photography really give me fulfillment in my life. It’s a creative outlet for me to tell stories and document things,” Tiffany said.

Tiffany had originally wanted to study English and creative writing in college. When she was looking at colleges, she saw that UMPI had an English program with a concentration in creative writing. Tiffany did not know about the PCJ program, which was a very small program that she

did not see advertised.

“I really already had in my mind that I wanted to pursue something with writing. I wrote a lot in high school, so that was dear to my heart,” Tiffany said. “When I was looking at colleges, particularly at UMPI, I saw that they had a really great English program and a Creative Writing concentration.”

She attended Accepted Students Day, where UMPI programs could advertise and showcase themselves to incoming freshmen. She stopped by the University Times, PCJ and English department tables. Tiffany still had her mind set on English and she was about to leave the building when the U Times newspaper editor approached her.

“He actually followed me across the gym, and he took that moment to really tell me how amazing PCJ was. He persuaded me that I needed to join PCJ because there was more opportunities for me as an individual there,” Tiffany said. “I would still get to write and do other things that I love, just in a different concentration. That kind of stuck in my mind and I ended up changing to that.”

Many freshmen are very nervous for their first weeks in college, especially Tiffany, who was transitioning from a homeschool education. Despite the uncertainty, Tiffany made the transition very well. She enjoyed UMPI’s teaching methods and course policies. Tiffany learned that some classes at the university were project-based and did not center their grading around testing. She enjoyed these methods because they were so similar to her homeschool education.

“The transition to UMPI was so much easier than I thought and the support there was so good. I made a lot of friends,” Tiffany said. “It wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be and I actually did really well, but I don’t know if I would have done as well at another school. So, I think that UMPI was the perfect place to go.”

Tiffany’s first encounter with Dr. J was when she toured campus in the spring semester before her freshmen year. Tiffany and her father met with Dr. J in her office, which was in Normal Hall at the time. She remembers her dad asking her future professor many questions about the program. He wanted to make sure she was making the right decision and Tiffany felt a little embarrassed

with his number of questions. Despite the small amount of embarrassment, Tiffany felt very reassured by Dr. J, who was talking very positively about the PCJ program.

“She explained how the program would go. She said that it would be very challenging, but it'd be very rewarding. I just felt if I came into the program, then she would kind of like wrap me under her wing and I'd become part of the family,” Tiffany said.

After a couple months in the program, Tiffany was becoming very comfortable on campus and in class. Once she started to have multiple PCJ classes with Dr. J in her sophomore year, Tiffany started to bond with her professor. They worked very closely on projects and Tiffany got to learn about her professor's organization, BEYOND LIMITS. She saw Dr. J's special ability to connect with her students, which is something that is rare with professors and their students.

“She really cares about the well-being of her students. I was able to share with her any challenge that was happening,” Tiffany said. “She was able to support me in any way and I always felt like she had my back.”

As Tiffany navigated college life, she quickly got involved in many campus activities and extracurriculars. She was a writer on the U Times and became the president of the National Society of Leadership and Success in her later years. She was an orientation leader for a year. Tiffany was the president of the film club and also volunteered in some other things. A big aspect of her life on campus was her work study position in the Marketing and Communications office, where she gained lots of experience with photography and videography.

One of Tiffany's favorite memories in college was her trip to Washington, D.C., with Dr. J and other UMPI students. Dr. J, a few U Times staff members and five international students from China went on the trip together. Tiffany was able to bond with Chinese students, whom she may not have spoken to otherwise. The trip was educational, and it was one of the first opportunities that Tiffany got to learn about accessibility.

Tiffany got to travel with Dr. J, who is a person with paraplegia. She was able to see the daily struggles that Dr. J has to go through as someone in a wheelchair.

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As they ventured through Washington, D.C., Tiffany saw the city in a new light. She was impressed with how accessible the city was. Dr. J was able to maneuver around fairly well. The public areas in the city were accessible. The group visited many popular spots and monuments around the city, which were easy to access for Dr. J. Tiffany was even able to ride a fully accessible Uber with her professor.

“I found that Washington, D.C., was pretty accessible,” Tiffany said. “What we mostly ran into that was very challenging was like more privately owned establishments, such as restaurants or shops. Some of them were accessible, but not all of them were. There were definitely some challenges with that.”

In Tiffany’s senior year, she collaborated with another PCJ senior, Alyssa Sinclair, for their field experience practicum. The two decided to create a documentary about BEYOND LIMITS, Dr. J and her service dogs. Throughout the year, they filmed at several locations for the documentary. They wanted to gather footage of Dr. J during her day-to-day life. They filmed at the grocery store, the veterinarian’s office, the hairdresser and even Dr. J’s home.

“We would film and it was actually really nice because we got to see everything that she does on a daily basis. It always gives people a chance to see a woman in a wheelchair and how she can still do the same things anyone else can do,” Tiffany said. “She might have to do them a little differently or needs assistance in some places, but for the most part she’s independent.”

At the end of Tiffany’s senior year, COVID-19 hit, and her traveling plans with Dr. J and Alyssa were cancelled. The women decided to do a smaller trip up to Fort Kent. They visited a couple of places in the area and had lunch at the Swamp Buck.

“It was kind of funny because Saint and Dusty were under the table waiting for food to drop off the table,” Tiffany said. “We talked about the year, life and that was a really nice moment.”

During her time in the PCJ program, Tiffany completed many projects. She filmed “A Day in the Life of a Service Dog” during her sophomore year. She did advocacy work with Assistance Canine Training Services. Tiffany also completed focus groups with her classmates. Despite some projects being bigger than others, she is thankful for each one. Without each project, she would

not be the communicator and videographer she is today.

A big aspect of the PCJ program is getting to work collaboratively with others. Many PCJ projects have to be done together with classmates. Throughout many projects, Tiffany worked very closely with her classmates. She especially recalls her junior year when she worked closely with five other classmates for the ACTS and focus group projects.

“Those were really big projects that we all worked on together. We all knew each other really well and we worked great together. It was really good of PCJ to have that collaborative aspect,” Tiffany said.

All of the work she did in those three years prepared her for her most distinguished project: the documentary. She was grateful that Dr. J gave her and Alyssa the opportunity. The documentary gave Tiffany the power to advocate and tell the Lowmans' story through videography. She was also able to work closely with Alyssa and gain a friend in her through the process. Although the film has been released for almost a year, Tiffany still gets positive comments about it on YouTube to this day.

“That project was really important to both of us. I was really happy that Dr. J was allowing me to express my creativity and use something that I loved a lot. I was able to use my love for videography and make it part of the project,” Tiffany said.

Looking back on her PCJ career, Tiffany is grateful for all the opportunities she had with Dr. J and BEYOND LIMITS. She was able to travel and see Washington, D.C., with classmates and Dr. J. Tiffany was able express her love for videography while telling her professor's story through multiple projects.

“The whole thing was a journey. I had all these amazing moments along the way,” Tiffany said. “Without each piece of that puzzle, I wouldn't be where I am today and BEYOND LIMITS has definitely taught me some powerful lessons.”

Throughout her four years in the PCJ program, Tiffany saw BEYOND LIMITS grow and inspire people. She saw BEYOND LIMITS grow due to the students who helped it. Through their work, they helped with the organization's outreach. Tiffany advocated for BEYOND LIMITS and

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was able to be a part of an organization that is bigger than herself.

“I think BEYOND LIMITS definitely shows that we’re all very unique with our own challenges and our own goals,” Tiffany said. “I think the one thing that everyone has in common is that we each have our own barrier. There’s so much potential you can reach once you break that barrier.”

Having Dr. J as a professor and friend has meant so much to Tiffany. Dr. J has always been supportive of Tiffany and everything that she pursues. Tiffany appreciates Dr. J and all that she has done over the years. Due to Tiffany’s involvement with BEYOND LIMITS and her friendship with Dr. J, she now has a greater outlook at life.

“Dr. J really impacted me because she taught me that I really had to dig deep sometimes to achieve what I wanted,” Tiffany said. “She really instilled in me that I should believe in myself because I knew she always believed in me. That is how she inspired me during my journey in PCJ and it is the reason why I am here today.”



Their relationship consisted of many hours in Dr. J's office, where Tiffany is in the image above.



Lucinda Davenport was Jacqui's professor at Michigan State University, but since then, she is a supporter of BEYOND LIMITS. The two friends reunited a few years ago in Detroit at Jacqui's hotel, where Lucinda is pictured above.

Chapter 14: Almost a Straight A Student

Before Professor Jacqui Lowman was an educator at the University of Maine at Presque Isle, she was a student. When she pursued a graduate degree at Michigan State University in 1998, she met Professor Lucinda Davenport, who would later become a close friend of Jacqui's. Their relationship would start off as professional, then eventually become personal as they spent more time together. A few decades later and they are still bonded from their time at MSU.

Lucinda grew up in Texas and completed her undergraduate degree in journalism at Baylor University. She graduated and spent a couple of years working in Houston. Lucinda went for her master's degree in journalism at the University of Iowa. She decided to continue her education at Ohio University, where she earned her Ph.D. During all of this, she worked many jobs, building her resume. She worked as a newspaper reporter, as a news director at a public radio station and even in public relations.

Lucinda took her talents to Michigan State University and has spent the majority of her professional academic life there. She was the Director of the School of Journalism at MSU for a decade. She was the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research for the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. As the associate dean, she was in charge of 11 graduate programs. She has taught a variety of classes in the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs at MSU. Lucinda was able to work with Jacqui when she was her student in the graduate program.

When Jacqui was a graduate student, Lucinda always challenged her. Jacqui completed one of Lucinda's classes with a B grade, which was the only class she didn't receive an A in. The women still joke about that letter grade to this day. Lucinda was tough on her students and Jacqui was no exception. Jacqui was a great student in Lucinda's eyes. Jacqui was always eager to succeed in her classes. Lucinda noticed Jacqui's spirit and positive attitude in everything she did. She felt that Jacqui could accomplish anything if she put all her energy into it.

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After spending lots of time together outside of class, Lucinda and Jacqui began a friendship. Jacqui was serious about her education and having good communication with professors was important. As they spent a large amount of time together, Lucinda discovered how special Jacqui was. Having physical disadvantages did not stand in the way of Jacqui's success and ability to get an education.

"I have always admired Jacqui and the way that she has wanted to keep moving forward and be proactive by not letting others slow her down. She was having physical difficulties, but she was not going to let those slow her down either," Lucinda said. "She had a goal, and she was going to keep progressing forward to reach that goal. Sometimes if she would have a hurdle or an obstacle, we would talk about it and see what we could do about it."

As the two women grew closer, Lucinda became a friend and not just a professor. When Jacqui first came to MSU, she had not been diagnosed yet. She was not under the care of a physician and did not take medication. She was in a wheelchair and was not able to move her lower body at all or her upper body well. She was unable to turn the pages of her books, so Lucinda worked to find online versions of the materials Jacqui needed. At the turn of the century, online versions of textbooks were hard to come by. Lucinda sent emails and made phone calls to publishers, asking for online versions of the books. Once she was able to receive online versions of her books, Jacqui did not have to use her hands and arms. This made it easier for Jacqui to read. Lucinda did many things for Jacqui that she didn't have to do. These were acts of friendship, something uncommon in professor-student relationships.

Lucinda did many tasks like this for Jacqui during her time at MSU in the graduate program. Lucinda assisted Jacqui with things in her personal life as well. As a college professor, spouse, and parent, Lucinda had a busy schedule. This did not stop her from helping Jacqui with things that she needed.

"If somebody needs help, I'm there to help. If a person wants to try and achieve a goal, I am all for them and right there to support them," Lucinda said.

As Jacqui's close friend, Lucinda knew the huge role her father had on her. Lucinda was not able to meet Mr. Lowman, but she knew him from the stories Jacqui had told. Jacqui always tells

stories of her father to her close friends, students or anyone important in her life.

“I just think he must have been the greatest dad to have such a positive influence on her that she remembers his wonderful wisdom and his sage words of advice,” Lucinda said. “What a wonderful thing to know that you’ve been such a great dad to somebody who wants to move forward with the things that you hope that you’ve taught them well.”

When students graduate from school at any level, they naturally move on. After graduation, students often continue on and leave their college lives behind. Many of those students say goodbye to their professors and never talk to them again. People go their own separate ways and start new lifestyles. This was very different with Jacqui and Lucinda. The two women stayed in touch over the years.

Jacqui’s relationship with the organization BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential has allowed her to go on many trips and adventures. Jacqui contacts Lucinda and is continually updating her on every adventure she takes.

“It’s always an honor and it’s always very nice to be kept in students’ lives. And to see how they have, you know, succeeded as they go along,” Lucinda said.

In 2019, Jacqui and Lucinda were able to meet each other in person for the first time in many years. Jacqui traveled to Detroit for a conference with the Association for Business Communication and was able to see Lucinda. Jacqui contacted Lucinda six months prior to the conference, looking to meet up with her old friend. The two women were able to meet and have dinner. Lucinda was also able to meet Saint and Dusty, Jacqui’s service dogs.

“She met me outside and we had a very nice time,” Lucinda said. “She is very active in that organization. We were in the hallway and people kept stopping and saying ‘hello.’ She certainly has been influential in that organization. I was so amazed at how wonderful Dusty and Saint were with her. It was wonderful to be able to observe that relationship of co-dependency.”

Although Lucinda’s involvement with BEYOND LIMITS is small, she has still been attracted by the organization. She understands the organization’s mission to teach individuals to push beyond their perceived limits. She has supported Jacqui during her trips and hikes during the past

years. Lucinda recognizes that Jacqui uses herself as a tool to inspire and teach others.

Jacqui's outlook and approach to life are things that Lucinda has always admired. Even when she was not at her physical best, Jacqui was still confident and motivated. Jacqui passes along her confidence to her students when they are struggling. Giving students the reassurance they need can sometimes be the deciding factor in their confidence.

"Jacqui's always been confident, but I think that she also knows that she can make a difference in the world. Sometimes we don't know that about ourselves," Lucinda said. "With the things that she does and the successes of her students, she is helping other people realize that they can be successes as well."

A few decades ago, Lucinda and Jacqui became close friends, and it continues to this day. Lucinda's kindness and compassion were qualities that allowed their friendship to grow. Jacqui's resilience to improve and be a better student went perfectly with Lucinda's kindness. They fell into each other's lives at the right moment, which created a friendship that is still strong.

A few things have changed in Jacqui's life over the last decades. Jacqui is still in a wheelchair, but she is able to successfully move her upper body. Something that hasn't changed with Jacqui is her confidence and motivation to help people. That has always been there. Her attitude toward life and willingness to help her students is what makes her a unique educator.

"The one thing that has always stayed the same is my admiration for her. She is one of those people in life who wants to make a difference for others," Lucinda said. "I think that she was put on this earth to be a great role model for others. And whether that means that she is as a role model or whether she just wants to try and help other people, her goal in life is to help people in whatever way or capacity she can."

Lucinda's friendship with Jacqui has allowed her to be involved with BEYOND LIMITS, something she did not anticipate. She has watched Jacqui climb mountains and travel across the country. Lucinda has always been a supporter of BEYOND LIMITS: that has never changed. Lucinda believes that BEYOND LIMITS represents many things. The organization teaches individuals about social justice advocacy. BEYOND LIMITS represents an opportunity to grow

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and achieve your goals. All people have the ability to prove themselves wrong.

“We may all be different in the world, but we shouldn’t be limited by our differences. And we shouldn’t let others limit us by how they perceive our differences,” Lucinda said.

Conclusion:

Continuing BEYOND LIMITS' Story

A big thank you to everyone who was involved with this project. There were so many pieces to this project and it would not have happened without each person involved.

Looking back on this project, I realize that it would have been impossible without every little component. I started the project process by talking with my professor and BEYOND LIMITS' founder, Jacqui "Dr. J" Lowman. She came up with some names of people whom I could interview. We created a list of 16 people whom we thought I could talk with. We narrowed it down to 14. After that, I created a timeline. On that timeline, I decided when I would contact all the people, when I would interview them and when I would write their story. My timeline would not have worked if I didn't follow it, so I was very strict with myself about sticking to it.

As the school year went on, I stuck to my timeline and did what I needed to do. A couple of the interviews went smoothly, while some were quite difficult. Although some of the interviews didn't go as planned, they were still great learning moments for me. Each interview was unique because every person I talked with was different. My interviewees were of all ages and educational levels. They were all unique people, and the interviews gave me many opportunities to adapt to each person and learn from my challenges.

With my interviewees' permission, I recorded all of my interviews. After each interview took place, I reviewed the transcripts that were automatically created when I recorded in Zoom. I read through each transcript a couple of times so that I could familiarize myself with the content and quotes. I highlighted key points and my favorite quotes. Once I finished reviewing the transcripts, I created my story outlines. I wrote these outlines so that my writing process would be much easier.

Despite that, one of the hardest parts of the process was writing the stories. Before I even started writing, I reviewed my interviews to collect information and gather my quotes. From there, I created an outline for each story. With little distraction, each story took about seven or

eight hours due to its length. After I finished my writing process, I sent the stories off to Dr. J, who would review them and give me feedback. There were many occasions when my story wasn't flowing properly, so I had to adjust it. Each story went through a couple of revisions before it was done.

When I finished my last story, I created my book in Adobe InDesign. Due to my minor in graphic design, I was capable of using the application. I spent time with Dr. J to look at different layout options for the book. Rowena McPherson, the coordinator of graphic design, social media and photography on campus, also spent time with me, helping from a design standpoint. Her experience helped me tremendously. Once it was done, I had the book printed so that I could have a couple of physical copies to keep for myself and to give to others.

Having the opportunity to do this project allowed me to continue telling BEYOND LIMITS' story. Through my work, I was able to tell the stories and experiences of some people involved with the organization. I was able determine BEYOND LIMITS' essence and what the organization embodies. BEYOND LIMITS is not just for Dr. J, but it is an organization for everyone. The organization helps people to overcome their challenges. BEYOND LIMITS is about defeating the odds and achieving the impossible. A great benefit of this project was that each person I interviewed defined BEYOND LIMITS in a different way. The organization's essence is seen differently through each person's eyes. They all interpret it in their own way. Each story is different because all the people I interviewed are unique in their own ways. In the beginning of my project, I was worried that all of my stories would sound the same. After finishing my project, I realized that all the stories were differentiated because of the unique cast of people I interviewed. We are all different and I showcased that in the book.

I believe that this book benefits BEYOND LIMITS because it promotes many of the accomplishments and adventures the organization has completed. When my interviewees look at this book, I hope that they feel a sense of contribution to my project and BEYOND LIMITS' success. Every person I interviewed has positively contributed to either BEYOND LIMITS or Dr. J.

I hope that this Series of Short Stories promotes BEYOND LIMITS and every wonderful thing

the organization has done. I hope this book reaches people and inspires them to push past their perceived limits. My goal for this project was not to just complete a project so that I can graduate, but to do something that someone else could benefit from. I wanted to do a project that would help other people and I was lucky enough to work with BEYOND LIMITS.

As I look back on everything that I did for this project, I feel a sense of accomplishment. I knew that I would eventually finish this project, but I never imagined how it would turn out. I am proud of myself and everything I did. But this year also put many things into perspective. I got to see just how much writing and storytelling mean to me. I did not think that I would enjoy interviewing and writing as much as I did. This project confirmed my love for writing and storytelling, which is something that I hope to continue after graduation. I am eternally grateful for this project because it gave me the opportunity to work alongside BEYOND LIMITS and Dr. J. This Series of Short Stories is a collection of my best work and I hope you enjoyed it.



The author, Melanee Terry (left), the founder of BEYOND LIMITS: Awaken Your Potential, Jacqui Lowman, and her service dogs, Saint and Dusty.