

Book Review: Disarm Your Limits

Mary Ellen Heiner

03/25/2026



Reviewer and IDRPP Senior Program Coordinator Mary Ellen Heiner

When most people think about limits, they think about things that stop them. Jessica Cox's book *Disarm Your Limits: The Flight Formula to Lift You to Success and Propel You to the Next Horizon* invites readers to think differently. Jessica Cox, the world's first licensed pilot born without arms, shares her story to show that limits are not always barriers—they can become starting points for growth and exciting adventures.

Early in the book, Jessica introduces her "flight formula" to lift us to success and propel us to the next horizon: *adventure, desire, courage, innovation, balance, persistence, support, authenticity, and faith*. These are not just ideas; Jessica illustrates each one through very personal and private lived experiences. Her life becomes the blueprint. As I read, I found myself reflecting on which of those qualities I observed in myself—and which ones I still need to strengthen.

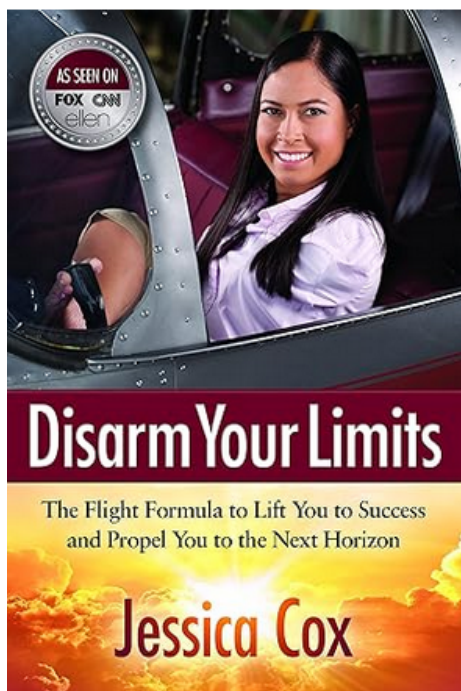
As I read this book, I found myself thinking about the many ways we sometimes hold ourselves back—not because we cannot succeed, but because we believe we cannot.

Reading this book also felt deeply personal to me. As someone who uses a wheelchair, I have faced many barriers—some physical, some created by other people's expectations, some of my own creation because of fear and even embarrassment because of my disability. Because of this, Jessica's story felt familiar in many ways. Her message reminded me that challenges do not define what we can achieve. Instead, they can teach us new ways to adapt, problem-solve, and keep moving forward. While our experiences are different, I connected deeply

with her belief that confidence grows when we try things that once seemed out of reach.

One quote she shares from Eddie Rickenbacker stood out to me: "*Aviation is proof that, given the will, we have the capacity to achieve the impossible.*" That idea captures the heart of this book. Jessica did not simply learn to cope—she learned to fly. Literally. She earned her pilot's license by flying with her feet, mastering an aircraft in a way most of us could never imagine. Her story is living proof that the impossible often becomes possible when determination meets opportunity. Jessica describes the challenge she had of finding someone who was willing to risk their own airplane, make modifications to enable her to fly with her feet, and then teach her how to fly. She describes eloquently that first solo flight and the fear she experienced when the radio went out mid-flight, realizing that she was totally on her own, and then the sudden freedom she felt as she soared into the sky and then the excitement as the wheels touched down on the runway and she had accomplished the impossible dream.

Jessica's mother said she was going to give her the most normal childhood possible. My mom once told me something similar: she said she didn't know how to raise a daughter with a disability, so she raised a daughter. That perspective shaped everything in my life as well as Jessica's. Expectations were not lowered. Independence was encouraged. Resilience was built early. Reading Jessica's story reminded me how powerful family belief can be in shaping our own self-belief, it also taught me the importance of a strong support network: family, friends, and community.



I have always loved the quote Jessica included from Eleanor Roosevelt who said: *“No one can make you feel inferior without your permission”* (also from one of my favorite chick-flick movies, *Princess Diaries*). Jessica’s life embodies that truth. She refuses to accept other people’s doubts to determine who she is. That is something many of us with disabilities learn over time—other people may question our capabilities, but we decide whether those voices determine who we can become.

Jessica reminds us that many of us — with or without disabilities — know the pain of being bullied, excluded, or left on the sidelines wishing we belonged. In Chapter 8, she shares the story of Louisa, whom she met while speaking at the 3rd Annual Conference of Women Aviators in Ghana, Africa. Louisa, who was born with no arms, endured severe bullying from classmates and even teachers. Her father abandoned the family at her birth—saying that she was an animal. Members of her community urged her mother to leave her in the wilderness to die.

Louisa’s story forced me to reflect on my own childhood. I was surrounded by a loving family, a supportive community, and a few loyal friends who made all the difference. Her experience underscores the life-changing power of a strong support network — and reminds me both how far we have come in how we treat individuals with disabilities, and how important it is to keep moving forward.

Faith is another strong thread throughout *Disarm Your Limits*. Jessica speaks openly about her belief that she

is exactly who God created her to be. That confidence in purpose shines through every chapter. Her life reflects a deep spiritual grounding that complements her physical and mental strength. She writes about finding balance on three levels—physical, mental, and spiritual. When those three areas are in balance, forward movement becomes possible.

Her story brings to mind what Randy Pausch once said—a quote Jessica herself referenced as a guiding truth in overcoming her fears: “Walls are there for a reason. They’re not there to keep us out. They’re there to stop the people who don’t want it badly enough.” For Jessica, that mindset became a strategy for defeating fear. She wanted it badly enough, and instead of letting fear hold her down, she faced it, trained through it, and ultimately flew beyond it. In doing so, she challenges readers to ask, “What fear is holding me back?” A dear friend once shared a simple but powerful truth with me: “Fear knocked at the door, faith opened it, and no one was there.” In the end, her journey reminds us that courage is not the absence of fear—it is choosing to move forward anyway..

One of the simplest yet most powerful messages in this book is this: if you want something badly enough, you will find a way. It may not look like everyone else’s path. It may require creativity, humility, and relentless persistence—but there is almost always a way forward. Jessica reinforces this idea by quoting Henry Ford: “When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off AGAINST the wind, not with it.” While going with the flow may be easier and more comfortable, she reminds us that true lift comes from leaning into resistance. It is in pushing against the wind—against doubt, fear, and hardship—that we build the strength, skill, and confidence to rise. In this way, the heart of *Disarm Your Limits* is clear: challenges are not meant to ground us, but to give us the very force we need to soar.

Disarm Your Limits is more than a Jessica’s story. It is a reminder that our greatest obstacles can become our greatest teachers. It is a call to examine the limits we have accepted and to question whether they are truly immovable—or simply waiting for us to test them.

For me, this book wasn’t just inspirational — it was deeply affirming. It reminded me that having a disability doesn’t make things impossible; instead, it fuels my determination to prove that anything is achievable. Sometimes, what appears to be a limitation becomes the very runway that launches us forward.

Editor’s note: *Disarm Your Limits* author Jessica Cox will speak at Utah State University’s International

Lounge in Logan on March 30 from 7 to 9 p.m. as part of USU Aviation Week.