

why Cox, the middle of three children, was born without arms. When she was born, her mother, who is a nurse, was inconsolable. Her father, a now retired music teacher, says he never shed a tear. He didn't believe she was a victim.

And Cox maintains she's never seen herself as one. "If you've never had something, there's no way to miss it," she says.

Cox wore prosthetic arms from age 3 to 14, but she never liked them and considered them a burden. She always preferred using her feet.

She washes her feet a lot-usually at least six times a day-and says if she could have any wish in the world it would be a lifetime supply of pedicures. She's always chipping the polish off her nails.

For practicality's sake, Cox usually wears clogs that are easy to slip in and out of. Her shoe often acts as a wallet.

She is a master of adaptability. Among the tasks she completes on her own: putting in contact lenses, text messaging, driving, talking on her cell phone (and she can do this while driving), putting on mascara, eyeliner and lipstick, and eating, including sipping a mocha with whipped cream while munching on Chicken McNuggets.



She also fills her tank with gas, which requires gymnastic skills. Because Cox stands only 5-foot-1, the credit card machine is a little high for her usual reach. So she's practically doing the splits when she slides her credit card.

Cox says she was subjected to a bit of teasing when, at 14, she went to a new junior high school. And just last month she overheard a teenager in a McDonald's make a snide remark upon seeing her sitting in a booth, eating with her feet.

"I'm weirded out by that," Cox recalls him saying.

She's taught herself not to obsess about such comments and stares-often she reacts with humor, asking gawking strangers whether they've never seen someone eat with their feet before.

"Never let your fears get in the way of your opportunities," Cox says in her typically cheery voice during a recent talk to about 30 girls at a local Girl Scout Leadership Day. "The word 'disability' is misleading. Probably the only true adversity I face is acceptance from others. Many other people suffer a true disability: a lack of faith in themselves."

The girls seem to instantly connect with Cox. They crowd around for a demonstration when she asks a few of them to try opening a soda can with their feet-something she can do with only one foot. No one completes the task. Seventeen-year-olds Krista Caponigro and Joy Bragdon nod their heads when Cox tells them they shouldn't be afraid of being different. The high school seniors say it's a good reminder.

"It's like, you shouldn't be afraid of doing what you want to do," Caponigro says. "Like going to school and trying not to be shy, thinking people are judging you. She shows that it doesn't matter."

The girls say they are amazed at her attitude. "Can't" is a word that Cox avoids.

"I prefer to say, 'That's something I haven't figured out yet,'" Cox tells them.

There are two things that Cox says she still hasn't

figured out: how to put her hair into a ponytail and how to rock-climb.

Nothing else? "Nope." A pause. "Flying, that was one for a while. But I can do that now."

Cox finds kids to be a generally bolder audience for her presentations. They ask questions like how she picks her nose and goes to the bathroom. Going to the bathroom is actually one of the trickier things she does-she uses a suction cup hook on a wall to pull up her pants.

Adults are more reserved. They want to know about how she drives a car, about her parents, and why on earth she would want to fly a plane.

Cox never actually did consider flying a plane until a member of Wright Flight, a Tucson-based non-profit group, approached her after a Rotary Club talk she gave in 2005. The group uses aviation as motivation. Cox had always had a fear of flying and had never even been in a single-engine plane, but she decided to give it a try anyway.

It would take three more years before she found the right plane to fly, however. Her instructors agreed that her "feet flying" method required an Ercope, but not just any Ercope.