

# **Blake's Cousin Letter**

**9/30/2019**

Hello all, I laughed as I began to type this as it's only fitting I waited until the last day of September to type my letter. My poor excuse is I'm out of school and have not had a due date in over a year. Many changes have happened in a short time, and this letter will start up in November of last year right after my last game of football.

Following the completion of my final game as a Mustang and having already graduated from SMSU, I was hoping to relax a bit for the next couple of weeks before I knew I had to make the move in December to the Minneapolis area. As Danielle and I started house hunting, the word relax was dropped out of my vocabulary. It was a very stressful time and we looked over countless listings trying to figure out the townhomes, duplex's, small houses we wanted to be shown on the days we drove to Minneapolis from Marshall. A former teammate and friend of mine happened to work for Edina Reality in Minneapolis, so he was a huge help to us and dedicated a lot of time to help put a roof over our head.

We had driven and looked at 5-6 places and had our sights set on a duplex home in St. Louis Park MN, the first suburb area SW of Minneapolis. We were back in Marshall feeling good about our choice, when we got the call that a couple had already signed for the duplex. We felt a little defeated, and did not know where to start back up. We had scoured over every listing within the budget on every website you can think of for the Minneapolis area. Through the fire and flames my buddy AJ who was helping us sent us a link to a house out on lake Minnetonka. The house is in Spring Park, MN about 30 minutes West of Minneapolis. We knew nothing about the area, it was a little farther outside of the city than we wanted, but boy has it served us well. We signed for the house the day we looked at it, we have a landlord who has helped us with any problems, and we have a beautiful lake view that I cant get enough of.

Being able to check the house off our list was the biggest and most satisfying priority, and now it was time to get the job. The same day we signed for our house, I had a job interview with UPS in Maple Grove. My roommate's brother in college worked at this UPS hub I was applying for and I had been talking to him for a couple years leading up to this interview knowing I wanted to work for UPS when I got done with college. He has a little pull being a seniority driver, and he put in a good word for me. I was hired the day I interviewed, and I started working UPS on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

I had no idea what I was getting into with UPS. I wanted the job because I like driving big vehicles, and I don't like working inside. Walking all day I knew I would get all the exercise I need as well. I thought it was a job for leisure, and would be light stress.

HA! I was in for quite the surprise. The hub I work in is the second largest in the state. We cover the entire North Metro area of Minneapolis. If you look at a map, Anything North of Minneapolis is covered by our hub. From Blaine and Lino Lakes to Elk River and Monticello, we cover it all.

When you start, you go through what they call your "30 days." This time frame is how they gauge and monitor your progress as a driver and essentially tells them whether or not you are cut out for the job. They can track everything you do at UPS whether its driving without your seatbelt on, how fast you are going at any given time, how hard you slam on the brakes, how long the door to the back of the truck is open for... It's all there for them to see. You are a deer in headlights the first few days you go out by yourself, but eventually you figure it out and it starts to come together. Addresses start to make sense, you know where to go for business deliveries and you know which docks to use. Backing up is a huge red flag for UPS. As drivers we try to back the least amount of times and distance that we can in a day. Any incidents, even if hitting a garbage can are catastrophic in the eyes of management and the company. Now coming up on 10 months at the job, things have slowed down for me and I do actually relax more at work. Once my time commit packages are off I can enjoy my radio station, feel the breeze from my open double doors, and enjoy the road. A standard day for me is 190-210 residential stops. Walking 8-12 miles depending if its rural or suburb housing areas is pretty typical. Unlike FedEx, we don't drive like maniacs up peoples driveways and do stupid things. We have respect towards our customers and park on the street and walk off our packages. If you see a UPS driver backed into somebody's driveway... they are wrong, and lazy.

Winter in Spring Park was quiet. We found a restaurant/bar named Lord Fletcher's just down the road from us that quickly turned into our hangout. It was really the only place we knew to be able to talk to people and get more understanding of our new area. As you know, Minnesota is the state of hockey. I have never played hockey in my life and I know little about it. I bought a pair of skates, a hockey stick, and 2 pucks, and made my way to one of the many outdoor rinks Minneapolis has to offer. Let's just say I had a blast and it turned into my Sunday tradition. I'm confident enough that I'll be able to join some pickup games this winter. Last winter I had to learn to skate as much as I had to learn to play hockey.

Our area outside the lake is still very scenic. I was able to hike a trail that led to a small pond in January and I brought my ice skates with for that very reason. It was myself out on the pond, and a couple of bald eagles. It was totally secluded and for a minute I thought I was almost in Alaska.

With Matthew being so close in St. Peter, he has been able to come up to Spring Park on more than a few occasions. We travelled to Sibley State Park and Afton State Park on the border of Minnesota/Wisconsin this past year and look to continue to grow our count of State Parks. It's kind of funny but we enjoy winter a lot more than summer. We like snow and having to put an extreme amount of layers on to be outside. Negative temperature days are a lot more attractive than temps in the 80's.

As spring came and the ice melted on the lake, it brought out the true colors of Spring Park. Motorcycles started to come back out, the drive in diner opened back up for it's season, and boats and jet-ski's started to rip out on the lake. Danielle found a new love for fishing because the lake is so accessible for us. I love to fish too, but there were many evenings Dan was the one pushing to go down to the docks and fish. We are able to catch bass, bluegill and crappie on a normal basis.

Jet-ski rentals are relatively cheap, and we rented one for 2 hours one evening and had a blast. I'll admit, my biggest fear in life is open water. I simply do not like it. Being on a boat is fine, no problem... but swimming or being stranded is a huge no for me in lakes or the ocean. Danielle tipped us over twice in the jet ski on purpose and I've never moved faster to get back on it and out of the water. The first time we went over I accidentally kicked her in the thigh because I was squirming so much to get back on the jet-ski and left a huge bruise. No harm done, but she called me out for being a baby haha.

This summer I had the honor of being the best man for my buddy Tyler Kluvers wedding. Tyler was the long snapper who played for Iowa who had the famous catch that “almost” scored against Ohio State. I looked forward to this day for a long time and he was the first of my childhood best friends to get married. Delivering the speech was nerve wracking and I spent a lot of time putting it together and fixing it up. I tried to make it short and sweet and not over the top. I think I did a good job of that. We danced the night away and it was sadly over before I knew it.

I have found a radio station up in Minneapolis that is utterly fantastic. It is highly praised and has won many awards for the work they do. It’s sports talk radio, and its right up my ally. I laugh daily because the personalities they have are hilarious, and it’s all things Minnesota sports. Although I am a Green Bay Packer fan, I enjoy hearing all things Vikings and probably know more about the Vikings than Packers simply because its what I listen to daily. Over the summer when football is in the offseason and the only thing on is baseball, I began to follow the Twins. They had a record year offensively, and made the postseason to face the Yankees coming up this Friday. I was able to go to 2 games this year where they played the Red Sox and Yankees. I almost found a new love for baseball as I had gotten away from it for quite some time. I know Grandpa likes his Dodgers, but it would be very neat to see the Twins bring home the World Series to Minneapolis.

Danielle and I caught a preseason Vikings game against the Seattle Seahawks [Woot Woot Sammans] as Danielle is a traitor being from Wisconsin and turning into a Vikings fan. Although she has a great excuse as she was able to intern for them all last season, you wont catch me cheering for the Vikings as I am loyal to the Packers. Danielle has a job now with the Timberwolves this upcoming NBA season and will be at every home game for the Wolves. She continues her pursuit of working for a professional sports team doing marketing and communications and is well on her way with a resume of Vikings and Timberwolves now on her plate.

Let's talk animals. Last August Danielle rescued a kitten who was found near the railroad tracks in Marshall. We named her Nala, and she is my pride and joy. Right before we were about to make our move to Minneapolis, an orange tabby cat who was sick, hungry, and cold showed up to our door. My roommate found it outside the house and brought it in to warm up. He was on his last limbs, and immediately fell asleep in his arms when brought inside. After taking him to the vet, getting some medications for an eye infection, and starting to get the cat healthy... There was no way Danielle was letting this cat go. We decided on the name Niko, and he is now kitty #2. Danielle has always been a dog person, but the cats really grew on us. Still we knew eventually we would get a dog. In May, Danielle had been looking and found a pup in the Marshall area at a shelter that she was interested in. I got a call at work that she was on her way to look at the dog... I instantly knew that she was going to bring it home lol. As you can guess, she did, and we now have Pip. He's a German Shepherd mix, and he is a very good boy. In slightly over 6 months we had added 3 animals to the house, and just a few weeks ago I got another surprise as well. We now have a 3<sup>rd</sup> kitten and we decided on the name Moose. 3 cats and a dog isn't too shabby, and for now that's more than enough. They all get along, and keep us entertained. We joke and call our house the Gimbel Farm.

To wrap this up, this past year has been one of growth. Through work, I have had to make many sacrifices and have missed out on events I would really like to be at. Once you make your one year at UPS, you are higher on the totem pole and it gets a little bit easier to get days off that you want. Although not far away in MN, I would still like to get home more than I do. I miss my family often, and when OUR family comes together in Sigourney and I have to miss out, those days are often very long for me. I hope I could put into perspective what life is for Danielle and I up here, and know that we are very happy with how things have worked out.

The Iowa Hawkeyes are 4-0 with a big tilt at Michigan this upcoming Saturday. Lyle and Grandpa I already know are just as excited as I am. I look to finish this year strong at work and transition into year 2 in Minnesota and being in the "real world". Love you all, and look forward to upcoming time spent together.

With Love, Blake.



Danielle and I the day we signed for our house.



This is our deck showing the lake and our backyard. I'm holding Nala and Danielle is holding Niko.





Pip and I at Afton State Park.



Niko in his favorite window spot.

Moose smiling after a Hawkeye win.







Curious Nala, heard the birds chirping. And my favorite photo of my family to date. Picture was taken at Tyler's wedding.



Casually hanging out the side of my UPS truck on my lunch break. And myself and two teammates from SMSU at the Twins game.