

Cousin Letter — September 2019

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Hey everyone! I'm so glad that we're doing this — it's hard to keep up with everybody now that we're getting so spread out. I've had a bunch of big transitions lately, so I'll break up the past year into a few sections, guided by pictures since that's the only way I can keep it straight myself.

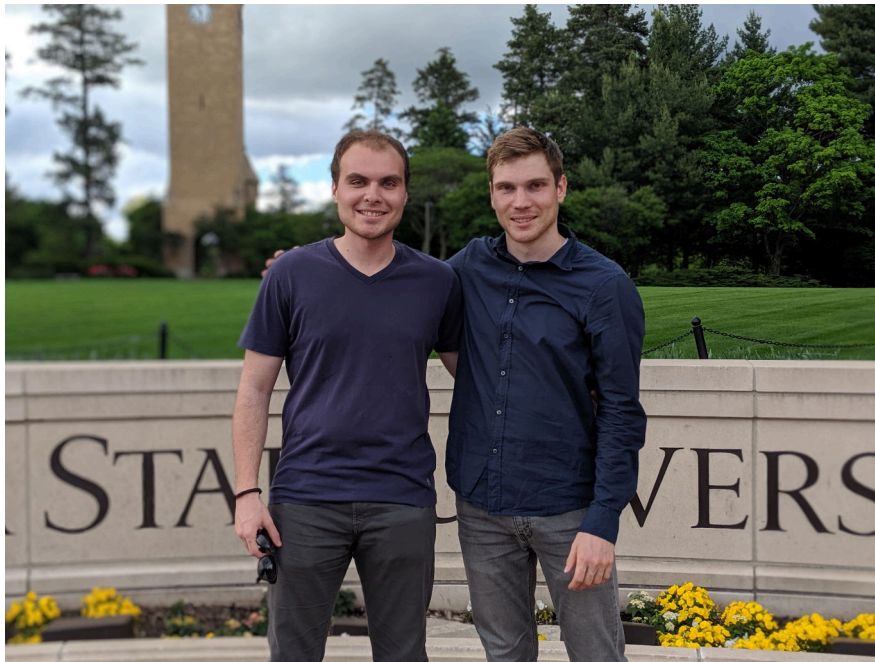
Last semester at ISU

Okay, the spring semester wasn't technically my last semester, but it's the last one that felt like school. So naturally I had to take the classic “graduating senior” class: Intro to Beer, Wine, & Spirits.



Now accepting invitations to bartend at your next event!

I took the course with my friend Marios, who is from Greece, but incredibly, has ties to Sigourney! We met during orientation for new Computer Science graduate students, and when I mentioned I was from Sigourney, he said, “Oh, I’ve been there!” Apparently he was in Montezuma to submit some paperwork while he was going to school at Grinnell, and became friends with a man who used to run the Sigourney Lumber Yard. What a small world!



Marios and I



Although an incredibly cold and snowy winter, it made campus absolutely gorgeous.

Spring Break

This year I was also able to travel outside the country for the first time. My roommate from last summer at IBM was going to Costa Rica with his family and they had an extra spot (and I think they wanted someone to keep him entertained so he wouldn't annoy them all.) It was a pretty amazing trip, and not just because I was 2,000 miles away from my laptop, although that did play a big factor.



Top-left: Our view from the villa we stayed in. Right: The Monteverde cloud forest. Bottom-left: Everyone on the trip.

The Thesis

Thanks (or not) to one of my professors being terrible at planning, I found out in April that I needed to finish my thesis within six weeks, when I had thought that I would have three months. This meant my April and May were extremely stressful and busy while I frantically finished experiments, tried to make a coherent document, and consumed large quantities of coffee. In the end, I was able to pull it all together and successfully defend at the end of May.



Unlikely to ever be read again, but it'll look nice on my bookshelf.

Summer in Ames

Being forced to finish my thesis so early in the summer turned out to provide me with a gift: I had the entire summer with no classes and just 20-30 hours of research work to do each week. It had been a few years since I'd spent the summer in Iowa, and was actually the first summer I'd been in Ames, so it was very fitting before I moved to the West Coast.



Lancelot and Elaine on Lake LaVerne.



Saw my favorite artist play at Red Rocks in Denver.



Turns out you can go skydiving in Boone!



I was able to rent a garden plot at ISU and grow a whole bunch of herbs (the deer ate the vegetables). Was particularly proud of the basil.

Seattle!

Finally, in August, I bid a bittersweet farewell to Ames, packed all my stuff into boxes, and stepped onto an airplane with a suitcase, a backpack, and my orchid that I couldn't bear to leave behind.

The first few weeks out here were a little bit rough while I tried to find a place to live, then spent a couple weeks with nothing but a mattress on the floor, one pot, a bowl, and a fork and a spoon. Turns out moving companies run on their own schedule. I'm much more settled in now after numerous trips to Target, Home Depot, and IKEA.

There are a few things that have surprised me after moving out here, like the oddly-shaped sticks of butter, ungodly amounts of wild blackberries, and a general lack of thunderstorms, but I've actually adjusted quite well. It's helped a lot that I know a number of people from school who moved out here after graduating, so I immediately had a friend group who could also introduce me to new people. It's pretty crazy how many ISU grads are here. We may start drawing suspicion soon...

Of course, the whole reason I moved was for my first job, so I can't leave that out!



Obligatory first-day-of-work selfie.

I've been working now for almost four weeks, and am really enjoying it between occasional moments of thinking "Am I really cut out for this?" The short summary of what I'm working on would be "Helping self-driving cars see obstacles with laser scanners so they don't hit things". It actually aligns really well with what I studied in school and is the right combination of research and engineering for me. Overall, I'm really liking it so far and am looking forward to the next year as I

get more involved and more comfortable with what I'm doing.

There's still a lot for me to explore around here, but here are a few pictures of places I've already visited.



Tiger Mountain. You can watch paragliders launch from here.



Seattle's famous "Gum Wall" I found this way more exciting than it should have been.



Skipping rocks in Discovery Park with some other east-of-the-Rockies transplants.

This is clearly the last section, but I'm bad at conclusions and farewells, so I'll instead leave you all with this beautiful Iowa sunset. I haven't seen one out here yet that can compare.

