

February 23, 2018

To Whom it May Concern,

As I reflect back on my time in the Western Hockey League I consider myself to have a very fortunate path during key years in my life. Despite the obvious benefits of playing the sport I love in front of thousands of hockey fans on a nightly basis; the WHL and Winterhawks organization set my family and I up for success years down the road, for events that I couldn't have dreamed to realize as a teenager at the time.

The five seasons I spent in the Western Hockey League (4 ½ years with Portland and ½ a year with Kamloops) was nothing short of exceptional. From the coaching staff, to trainers, and front office, everyone had a first-class approach and treated my teammates and I with the utmost respect. The team gave us every opportunity to succeed on the ice, which sometimes meant leaving the night before road games to get in early and rest. These decisions, while costly for the budget shows me now that the organization gave us every tool to succeed and left no stone unturned.

The three people that I couldn't have made it through my junior career without was my by billets: Susan Howe, Gary and Nina Barber. Susan opened her home to me at the ripe age of 16 years old and I spent four and a half unbelievable years with her in Portland. Leaving Edmonton, Alberta, Canada at such a young age was not an easy thing to do. Susan made her home my home and taught me many life lessons along the way, not to mention she went to culinary school, so her meals were outstanding. I was in my final season of the Western Hockey League I got traded to the Kamloops Blazers. Gary and Nina Barber, again welcomed me into their home and treated me like their own son. I wasn't in Kamloops for long, but I appreciated how helpful they were in getting me through a tough trade experience and guiding me along the way. I still talk to both billet families on a regular basis, both of which came to my wedding three summers ago, and 12 years after I initially met Susan Howe.

The Western Hockey League also gave me a lifelong connection as I met my wife in Portland when I was 19 years old. This might be the best gift a guy could receive as I now have roots in a city once foreign to me and one that I absolutely love.

The WHL Scholarship program is an unparalleled program that has infinite value. Again, this is something that when I was 17 years old I had no interest in using, but when the

time came I couldn't have been happier to receive a degree from one of the top universities in Canada, for free. Leaving university with absolutely zero debt has allowed me to fast track my life and get a head start on some important events. I am very fortunate to have saved up money during my time at university (while the students next to me had to take out high interest loans) and buy a condo in downtown Edmonton. That condo has since turned into an investment property as I have settled back home in Sherwood Park where I will raise my young family. Both properties would not have been made possible without the WHL Scholarship program being in place.

In closing, if someone asked me today: if I could change my path would I do it any different? Would I want anything more out of the Western Hockey League? I would reply with a resounding no. The route I took to get where I am today is a by-product of the Western Hockey League and the Portland Winterhawks organization, and I love how my life has turned out. The thing that I know is that any organization that has been around for 40+ years like the Western Hockey League has, is to make it that long they are always revamping and adapting to different situations. The Western Hockey League treated me well and I know it will for the current and future players that it gives the opportunity to play in.

Sincerely,

Kurtis Mucha

Portland Winterhawks Alumni (2005-2010)