Two blades are able to create friction and glide across a thin layer of water, when you add momentum, pads, a stick, and a puck you have ice hockey. Ice hockey was an essential part of my youth that grew and taught me many important lessons. It was a small choice I made at the age of four when my dad asked “Hey son, what do you think about learning to play hockey?” I was so young I really didn't know what it meant. We took a drive to the local “Pepsi Ice Center” in Bloomington Illinois, my dad rented me a pair of skates and I went out with a young crowd of kids to open skate. I remember it being fun, although I was probably a deer in headlights at the time there was no sign of difficulty although I was perhaps too young to know what struggling even was. After my first time on the ice, I was addicted I kept asking to go back to open skate, and with practice, I got a little better each time. Time played its role and I developed a skill and love for the sport. This was something I had never felt before being so young, I eventually got my own skates and then moved up and got a stick, gloves, and helmet, and by the age of 5, I had all of the gear, skates, stick, helmet, shoulder pads, elbow pads, shin pads, and pants. I was ready.

I did not play traditional sports such as baseball, football, and basketball. Growing up I sort of envied friends in school that all played on the same teams and had common knowledge about the sports, I was never too good on the blacktop playing recess basketball, probably last to pick. It wasn't that I couldn't try these sports, but I had a good thing going. I played for a competitive hockey team, practiced a lot, and was getting good! It took maturity for me to understand that I stood out amongst my peers as a hockey player, I liked it some days and I disliked it others. What I did like was tying my skates tight and feeling the cold air of the ice rank. I learned the important lesson of taking different paths, this showed when I chose to move across the country for college and probably to make the decision to study engineering, I probably should have thought about that one a little bit more! I progressed in ice hockey, fast. I am a very hand-eye-coordinated person, even more so when I was younger. I was always juggling balls or fruit, playing around with yoyos, or fiddling with a ukulele. Ice skating is not necessarily the hard part it's controlling the stick and puck while you're ice skating. My dad would take me to the ice rank during off days to open skate so I could work on my skate skills apart from the team, 50 times around forwards, 30 times around backwards, and back at home I worked on stick skills in the garage. It really set me apart from the team at a young age. This is when I played for the club team growing up from ages 5-12, where I made a lot of my friends most being from other schools it gave me a unique crew to be around. Ice hockey is a different style of sport, you sort of grew up fast compared to other sports where your parents help you get ready on the sidelines outside, or you can hear their voices yelling from the stands. Hockey was very isolated, you got ready alone in the locker room, on the ice it's loud, with the tall walls you don't hear your family cheering you, you are figuring it out on your own alongside the teammates. We were in the locker room at a young age this was an intimidating time because your parents were no longer there to help you get ready and give you words of encouragement, you had to motivate yourself. You also have a lot of gear to put on and keep track of, it gives young kids a sense of responsibility it also teaches you about preparation before execution.

Center, face off, this was me. I worked myself on and off the ice to be a versatile hockey player. I had to know how to defend and score, being labeled as the center position in hockey comes with a lot of responsibility. You are in control of the ice from the very beginning. The game starts I head to the very center of the ice, a small blue dot, I look into the eyes of the opposing team as we bend down and wait for the whistle, BOOM! The puck is dropped a random bounce takes place, and I slap it backwards to my defender. We have the first position, we have control, and we have the game. It's about confidence and awareness. I had to be truthful to myself that I was not going to win every face-off, I had to be aware that my team and I were together no matter the outcome. With this position and the help of my teammates, I was able to grow my skills even more, I was averaging two to three goals a game, I was skating well and I was awarded the captain of my team a couple of years in a row. I was starting to get looked at by travel teams, recruiters were reaching out to my parents and decisions had to get made based on what I had in mind for my future.

When these times were happening I was excited, but most importantly I was reminded. When opportunities started presenting themselves I was reminded of the work I have put in, on and off the ice. I was reminded of the little boy who lugged his hockey bag to the ice center that weighed more than him, the one who tied his own skates. I was reminded that I chose a different path and it taught me discipline, responsibility, teamwork, and leadership, it taught me that it was okay to be uncommon amongst your peers. Over the years and practice and love for the sport I eventually began to fall out of it, as I focused on circulars, friends, and family, I had to get ready for college and a new chapter was starting, it was time to end. I never forget all of the important lessons that I was taught because of the two blades that are able to create friction and glide across a thin layer of water.