

BLAKE'S STORY & INSPIRATION

Blake's passion and dedication to basketball started when he was a young kid growing up in Orange County. By the time he graduated high school, he was a four-year varsity member of the Mater Dei Boys Basketball team with two CIF and two CA State Championships under his belt.

Blake's journey wasn't without challenges. The year 2007 brought some of the highest highs and lowest lows for Blake. During that pivotal junior year, he was honored with the CIF Sportsmanship Award, and his mom, Brigitte, was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. With this diagnosis, Blake had to take on a lot of unexpected duties and was forced to grow up faster than typical 17-year olds. Despite the changes at home, he remained dedicated to his team, and took solace in his passion for basketball. The following year, Blake was appointed senior captain and led Mater Dei to a 35-1 record alongside a top five national ranking.

When it was time to look beyond high school, Blake turned down smaller Division 1 basketball scholarships to be a preferred walk on at UCLA. He knew that a great education and network would take him further in life, and the choice also allowed him to stay close to home. Within two years of being diagnosed, his mom's condition wasn't improving. The summer before his sophomore year at UCLA, she suddenly passed away from complications with Multiple Sclerosis. It was an incredibly difficult time for Blake and his loved ones.

But Blake channeled his grief into dedication—dedication to his mom's legacy and to the sport that helped keep him centered during the toughest chapter of his life. With the love and support of family and friends, he returned for his sophomore year with a newfound purpose in life to raise awareness and help combat Multiple Sclerosis. He was awarded the UCLA Athletics Rose Gilbert Courage and Character Award for starting an online fund in honor of his mom. That same year, he earned a full basketball scholarship and later graduated with a degree in Sociology in 2012.

Since college, Blake has had a unique career path working in digital advertising, sports coaching, startups and entrepreneurship.

Through all the highs and lows that he has experienced so far, what continues to motivate Blake every day is his mom, Brigitte. She instilled a mentality that he strives to live by in her honor: count your blessings, live by the golden rule and never give up.



BRIGITTE'S STORY

Brigitte Renae DeRouen was born on May 7, 1960 in El Paso, Texas and given up for adoption to a low income foster family. She had a tough childhood and always yearned to learn about her biological family. Through focus and determination, she became a high school track star, honor roll student and earned a full academic scholarship to the University of Texas at Austin, graduating with a nursing degree in 1982.

Soon after, she met her future husband Beat who had moved from Switzerland to start an engineering career in the U.S. They married and had Blake in Dallas, Texas in 1989. Three weeks later, they packed up and moved to Orange County, CA where she accepted a role as an ER nurse and Beat started his own structural engineering firm.

Blake's sister Bianca was born two years later. Soon after her daughter's birth, Brigitte finally met her biological family in Indiana after years of searching. Brigitte learned that she coincidentally had a half-sister named Bianca, unbeknownst to her at the time she named her daughter. The family continued to speak and became closer over the years. Soon after, Brigitte and Beat parted ways, but they both remained focused on being great parents to their children. Brigitte met her future second husband Frank in 1994 and he became a second dad to Blake and Bianca.

A few years later, Brigitte transitioned from nursing to pharmaceutical sales, working at Amgen and Merck. In her new role she was continually awarded top sales honors and broke glass ceilings as a woman of color. Coming from nothing and working up to this moment with her family was a dream come true.

She was the rock and leader of the family. Her positive mentality, values, and love were instilled in all who were close to her. She had a smile that truly lit up a room and took the time to make friends with anyone she spoke to—from Malcolm, the local Ralph's employee to Sue, the waitress at a small Chinese restaurant.

In 2007, at only 47 years old, Brigitte was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. The pain and gradual loss of motor skills took its toll during the aggressive progression of the illness. She fought the disease with all she had, but suddenly passed away two years later on July 30th, 2009.

While we take comfort in knowing that she's in a better place looking down on her loved ones, she is missed each and every day. Her spirit and love live on through her family and will never be forgotten.





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