

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

The Echo of Laini Saba

If you look at my hands now—hovering over a mechanical keyboard, typing Linux commands, configuring servers, and orchestrating systems in the cloud—you would never guess where they began. You would never guess that these same hands once traced the rough, uneven walls of a mud house in Laini Saba, Kibra—Africa’s second-largest informal settlement. You would not imagine that they once wiped muddy water from a leaking floor during the rainy season, or clenched into small fists of uncertainty when school fees became a monthly crisis.

I am Mateli Boniface Kioko, a fourth-year student at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT), standing at the edge of my final semester in the Bachelor of Business Information Technology (BBIT) program. On paper, I am ordinary—just another Kenyan university student preparing to graduate. But behind that paper identity exists a life shaped by scarcity, resilience, prayer, failure, and reconstruction. My presence in a university classroom is not accidental; it is the outcome of survival.

To the outside world, my journey might appear unremarkable. Kenya produces thousands of graduates every year. But when viewed through the geography of my upbringing, my existence here becomes a statistical improbability. Children raised in informal settlements like Kibra are quietly expected to disappear from the education system long before university. Some disappear into crime. Others into addiction. Many into silence. Very few emerge carrying degrees, ambition, and long-term vision. This essay exists because I refused to disappear.

Why My Story Matters

This is not a story told to inspire pity, nor to claim uniqueness. I write this autobiography as **evidence**—evidence that geography does not dictate destiny, even though it tries very hard to. I write as proof that the environment into which one is born may influence probability, but it does not permanently lock outcome.

More importantly, this is a story of **systems**: family systems, educational systems, religious systems, and personal systems. I grew up watching how systems fail the poor—and how, occasionally, individual human beings disrupt those failures through sacrifice and grace. My life has been shaped not only by my own decisions, but by the quiet heroism of others: a praying mother, two resilient brothers, and a sponsor who chose to believe in a boy from the slums.

I am also writing this story at a critical point in my life. I am no longer a child struggling to survive, but I am not yet the man I aim to become. I stand in the uncomfortable space between **who I was** and **who I am deliberately becoming**. This is the moment where reflection matters, because understanding where I come from determines how responsibly I move forward.

The Key Themes of My Existence

As I reflect on my journey, I recognize three dominant themes that have repeatedly defined my life: **resilience**, **divine intervention (or what some might call luck)**, and **focus**.

Resilience

Resilience, for me, was not motivational language—it was compulsory. Growing up in a family of four, raised by a single mother earning a modest teacher’s salary, resilience was not something we discussed; it was something we practiced daily. There was no space for surrender. Giving up was a luxury we could not afford. Hunger, uncertainty, and instability demanded persistence, even when hope felt irrational.

Resilience meant waking up to the same struggles and choosing to continue anyway. It meant understanding, at a very young age, that excuses do not feed families and that discipline often matters more than talent.

Divine Intervention (or Luck)

There are moments in my life that cannot be logically explained by effort alone. One such moment is the sponsorship I received through the YMCA—a lifeline extended by a man named Manager Ken. From high school through to my third year of university, he carried the financial burden of my education.

Hard work did not create that opportunity. The background did not qualify me for it. Merit alone did not guarantee it. It was grace—unplanned, unearned, and undeserved. Whether one calls it divine intervention or luck, I have learned humility in accepting that not everything good in life is a reward for effort. Some doors open because someone else believed.

This realization has shaped how I interpret success. I no longer see achievement as a solo performance. I see it as a relay race, where someone runs the first laps on your behalf.

Focus

The most painful lesson in my life has been the importance of focus. I learned early that **talent without discipline is dangerous**. Growing up in Kibra, I had both musical and football talent, but the environments surrounding those talents were riddled with temptation and crime. Choosing survival over passion was my first major act of focus.

Later, in university, I lost this focus—and paid dearly for it. Failing my exams and repeating a year was a moment of profound shame, but also my greatest awakening. It taught me that intelligence does not compensate for complacency, and that opportunity must be actively defended.

The Purpose of This Journey

This autobiographical essay is not merely a chronological retelling of events. It is an excavation—a careful dissection of how a boy raised in survival mode constructed his worldview, and how he is now deconstructing and rebuilding it based on ambition, discipline, and intentional living.

It is a story about my brothers, Simon and Erick, who absorbed the impact of struggle so I could experience its lessons with less damage. It is a story about a mother whose prayers followed me even when my faith wavered. It is a story about failure, redemption, and the quiet obsession with building something meaningful.

As I write this, I am looking backward at the mud that molded me and forward toward a digital future I am determined to build. I am learning that life, like software, is iterative. Versions fail. Bugs appear. Systems crash. But with reflection, debugging, and persistence, a stronger version always emerges.

This is my compilation process.

What follows is the source code of my becoming

CHAPTER TWO: Early Life & Family Background

The Architecture of Survival

I was born into a world where privacy was a myth and silence was rare. Laini Saba, Kibra, is not merely a place on a map; it is a living organism that breathes noise, movement, and uncertainty. Life there assaults the senses continuously. Corrugated

iron sheets rattle in the wind like loose drums. Children shout across narrow corridors formed by tightly packed houses. Radios, arguments, laughter, and sirens blend into a single background hum that never truly fades. Even at night, the slum does not fully sleep.

We lived in a mud house—walls molded from earth and reinforced more by hope than by structure. During the rainy seasons, anxiety sat heavy in our home. Rain in Kibra is not romantic; it is invasive. Water creeps through cracks, dissolving the walls slowly, threatening to collapse what little protection you have. When it rained, sleep came lightly. Everyone listened for signs of failure—walls softening, floors flooding, roofs leaking. Safety felt temporary.

Yet, inside those fragile walls, my mother built something far stronger than cement: a system of values. In a place where survival often demands moral compromise, she taught us discipline, respect, and restraint. She taught us that we may live in hardship, but hardship would not define our character.

A Family of Four

We were a family of four—my mother and her three sons. I am the last-born. In families shaped by struggle, birth order carries meaning. Being the youngest often means inheriting both protection and pressure. I grew up shielded from the harshest edges of reality, not because they were absent, but because my brothers intercepted them first.

My childhood was marked by observation. I watched my brothers adapt quickly to responsibility. I learned early that survival is rarely an individual effort. It is collective. Whatever I am today is tied directly to the sacrifices they made quietly, without seeking acknowledgment.

Our household functioned as a small survival unit. Resources were shared, stress was collective, and failures affected everyone. There was no such thing as personal success disconnected from family. If one of us fell, the entire structure trembled.

The Matriarch: A Teacher's Sacrifice

My mother is currently settled in Masinga, Machakos—a place far quieter than Kibra. But when I think of home, I still see her inside that mud house, exhausted yet unyielding. She was a teacher in a private school, a profession that carries societal respect but often comes with wages that barely sustain survival. Her salary could not match the demands of raising three boys in Nairobi's most unforgiving economic environment.

How she made ends meet remains a mystery to me. The mathematics does not add up. Food, rent, uniforms, books, transport—each item demanded money that simply wasn't enough. Yet, somehow, we survived. Not comfortably, but consistently.

Her sacrifices were not dramatic; they were daily. There were nights she went without food so that we could eat. Moments where she prioritized school fees over medical care. Times when her exhaustion was evident, but her resolve never wavered. She gave everything—financially, emotionally, spiritually.

But perhaps her most powerful contribution was **alignment**. In a place where children drift easily into danger, she structured our lives around accountability. She anchored us in the church—not merely as a religious obligation, but as a protective system. Church kept us occupied, supervised, and grounded. It offered routine in chaos and moral clarity in an environment where moral shortcuts were abundant.

Today, I struggle with organized religion. I wrestle with its contradictions, its politics, and its frequent misuse as a tool for division. Yet, I cannot dismiss the power of my mother's prayers. Doors open in my life in ways I cannot explain logically. Opportunities appear when all variables suggest failure. I attribute this grace to a mother who knelt on a mud floor and prayed relentlessly for sons she could not physically protect from everything.

The Brothers Who Built the Shield

If my mother was the architect of our survival, my brothers were the builders.

Simon: The Unofficial Father

My eldest brother, Simon, assumed a role he never volunteered for. In the absence of a father, he became one by necessity. His authority was not loud, but it was firm. He corrected when needed, guided when possible, and protected at all times. Through him, I learned accountability.

Simon showed me that manhood is less about dominance and more about responsibility. Watching him mature prematurely taught me that leadership often begins in discomfort. Even today, his influence operates as a silent compass in my life. I make decisions with the awareness that I represent not just myself, but the sacrifices he made on my behalf.

Erick: The Definition of Grit

My second-born brother, Erick, embodies resilience in its rawest form. One memory defines him in my mind forever: Erick walking from Eastleigh to Kibra—miles of dust, exhaustion, and hunger—simply to attend Nairobis, a digital skills training institution.

He did not have fare. He often had no lunch money. Yet, he walked. Day after day. Not because he enjoyed suffering, but because the future demanded sacrifice. While I sit today in front of laptops complaining about slow internet or complex code, I remember Erick walking under the sun just to access a computer.

His journey reframed my understanding of struggle. Compared to his, my challenges feel privileged. His perseverance planted a deep seed in me: **If he could endure physical exhaustion for his future, I could endure mental exhaustion for mine.** His life raised my standard.

Poverty as a Teacher

Growing up poor teaches lessons no textbook can provide. It trains the mind to prioritize, to improvise, and to endure discomfort. But it also plants fear—fear of sickness, fear of eviction, fear of rain, fear of failure. Scarcity reshapes decision-making. It makes every mistake feel catastrophic because recovery is expensive.

As a child, I internalized this pressure silently. I learned to be careful, not because I was cautious by nature, but because risk carried consequences we could not afford. That mindset followed me into adulthood, shaping how I view education, opportunity, and responsibility.

Foundations Laid in Mud

Despite the instability of our physical environment, my family laid a stable psychological foundation. We did not have much, but we had structure. Respect was mandatory. Education was non-negotiable. Laziness was unacceptable. Those principles anchored me when temptation surrounded me later in life.

Looking back now, I realize that my upbringing did not cripple me—it calibrated me. It trained me to survive pressure, adapt to uncertainty, and respect opportunity. The mud walls may have limited us materially, but they forged resilience that no comfortable upbringing could replicate.

This chapter of my life explains everything that follows. Without understanding where I come from, my failures would seem irrational, and my successes undeserved. Laini Saba did not define my limits—but it defined my starting point.

CHAPTER THREE: CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Growing Up Inside the Noise

Childhood in Laini Saba was not gentle. It was loud, competitive, and unforgiving, yet strangely alive. From an early age, I learned that space was a shared commodity. Homes pressed against each other. Pathways doubled as playgrounds. Privacy existed only in imagination. Every action—playing, crying, arguing—happened in public view.

This environment accelerated maturity. There was little room for prolonged innocence. Children learned quickly to observe, to listen, and to adapt. One mistake could cost you safety, respect, or belonging. I became alert early—not out of fear alone, but out of necessity. Kibra rewards awareness and punishes carelessness.

Yet, within this chaos, life continued. Laughter still erupted. Dreams still formed. Children still competed, played, and imagined futures beyond the visible horizon of tin roofs and muddy paths. I was one of those children—absorbing the environment while quietly searching for something more.

Primary School: Discipline Amid Disorder

Primary school in Kibra was a paradox. Outside the classroom existed disorder, poverty, and instability. Inside, discipline reigned. Uniforms were enforced with military seriousness, not because appearances mattered, but because order was a defense against chaos.

Education became my first structured escape. School offered predictability: timetables, rules, expectations. It rewarded effort in measurable ways—marks, recognition, progress. For a child from an unpredictable environment, this predictability was comforting. It suggested that effort could lead to progress, even when life outside suggested otherwise.

Teachers pushed us hard, knowing that most of us did not have second chances waiting elsewhere. Failure did not just mean repeating a class—it often meant disappearing from school entirely. That awareness cultivated seriousness early. I understood that education was not optional; it was survival.

Finding My Voice Through Music

It was in primary school that I discovered I had a voice—both literally and metaphorically. I joined the school music team without fully understanding its significance. At first, it was simply an activity, a break from routine. But it quickly became discipline.

Music demanded precision. Timing mattered. Breath control mattered. Team coordination mattered. We practiced until our throats burned and our concentration sharpened. Excellence was not accidental—it was rehearsed relentlessly.

Our dedication bore fruit when we qualified for the National Music Festivals in Kisumu. For a boy who had rarely left Nairobi, the journey itself was transformative. Watching landscapes change through a bus window expanded my understanding of Kenya—and my place within it.

Standing on a national stage changed something inside me. It taught me that talent, when combined with discipline, could temporarily transcend environment. For those moments, I was not a “Kibra boy.” I was simply a performer, judged by skill rather than background.

That experience planted a dangerous but necessary idea: **that my life could stretch beyond where it began.**

Football: Talent, Temptation, and Threat

Football was the heartbeat of Kibra boys. It was our language, our status system, and our refuge. In the narrow corridors and dusty patches between houses, we played endlessly. I was gifted. Movement came naturally. Control felt intuitive. When I played, everything else disappeared.

But in Kibra, the football pitch is rarely just a pitch. It is a meeting ground—of ambition, pressure, and criminal influence. Older boys watched closely. Talent attracted attention, and attention came with expectation. Slowly, football shifted from sport to recruitment ground.

I observed peers change gradually. Teammates became associates. Associates became operatives. Some disappeared into gangs. Some into drugs. Some into prison. Some into graves.

The most frightening part was how normal the transition seemed. Nobody woke up deciding to ruin their life. It happened incrementally—through loyalty, pressure, hunger, and fear.

I stood at a quiet crossroads. Continuing football in that environment meant exposure to forces I was not equipped to fight. Leaving meant abandoning something I loved deeply. I chose to walk away.

That decision hurt. It felt like betrayal—of myself, of my talent. But it was an act of survival. For the first time, I consciously traded present joy for future safety. That choice shaped how I make decisions even today.

Watching Others Fall

One of the heaviest burdens of growing up in Kibra is witnessing potential die prematurely. I watched boys who were sharper, stronger, and more confident than me lose direction. Some were pulled into crime. Others into addiction. Others faded quietly under the weight of hopelessness.

This created a complex emotional mix: fear, survivor's guilt, and determination. I often asked myself why I was spared. Why my path bent away from danger while others were consumed by it. The answers were never clear.

These observations disciplined me psychologically. They taught me that **talent alone is insufficient**. That **environment is powerful**. And that **escape requires intentional resistance**, not passive hope.

The Weight of Expectation

As I advanced through primary school, awareness settled in. I understood that my life was being invested in—emotionally and spiritually—by my family. I could not afford casual mistakes. Every poor decision felt like disrespect to sacrifice.

This pressure was not imposed verbally. Nobody reminded me daily. It existed internally—a quiet accountability. I carried the understanding that my success or failure would ripple beyond me.

That realization matured me early. Childhood fun coexisted with seriousness. I learned to laugh, but I also learned to calculate consequences. That balance would define many of my later decisions.

The Gift of Sponsorship

Approaching the end of primary school, reality struck sharply: high school fees. My mother was already stretched thin supporting my brothers. Academic ability alone could not fund education. The dream felt fragile.

Then came intervention. Through the YMCA program, I secured a sponsor—Manager Ken. His support did not arrive dramatically. It arrived decisively. With that commitment, the barrier between me and secondary education collapsed.

That moment reframed my understanding of community. I learned that sometimes progress arrives not through effort alone, but through unexpected belief from others. Manager Ken's faith in me created an obligation—to justify the investment with discipline and integrity.

Without that sponsorship, my educational journey would have ended quietly in Kibra. With it, my future expanded.

The End of Innocence

By the time I completed primary school, childhood was largely behind me. Life had already introduced risk, responsibility, and consequence. I was no longer unaware of danger. I understood loss, temptation, and sacrifice.

But I also carried hope—tempered, cautious, and grounded. Music had shown me excellence. Football had taught me restraint. Community had demonstrated risk. Sponsorship had proven possibility.

This chapter marked the end of innocence and the beginning of intentional becoming. The boy who left primary school was no longer just surviving—he was preparing.

CHAPTER FOUR: ADOLESCENCE & IDENTITY FORMATION

Crossing the Border Between Worlds

Joining Mwaani Boys High School marked a physical and psychological departure from everything familiar. I was leaving behind the dense chaos of Kibra and stepping into a structured environment intentionally designed for learning. The transition felt like crossing an invisible border—one that separated survival from preparation.

The silence alone was unsettling. The absence of constant noise forced me inward. For the first time, I could hear my own thoughts clearly. The pressure that came with that clarity was heavy. I was no longer merely surviving day to day; I was expected to *perform*, to justify the investment others had made in me.

I arrived at Mwaani Boys carrying invisible luggage—expectations from my family, faith from my sponsor, and a quiet fear of failure. I knew instinctively that I did not belong to myself alone anymore.

Living With the Weight of Sponsorship

Sponsorship is both a privilege and a psychological burden. Every textbook I held reminded me that someone else had paid for it. Every exam felt like an accountability report. Failure was not just personal; it would ripple outward to people who believed in me without guaranteed returns.

This pressure sharpened my discipline. I studied not out of love for grades, but out of responsibility. I understood that opportunity is fragile, especially for boys from informal settlements. There was no alternative plan waiting for me if this failed.

That awareness matured me prematurely. While other students planned mischief freely, I measured consequences carefully. I learned restraint—not because I lacked desire, but because I understood cost.

Identity in a New Social Landscape

Secondary school introduced me to diverse backgrounds. I met students who came from stability—homes with electricity that never failed, parents who paid fees on time, and futures that felt guaranteed. Being among them forced comparison.

At times, I felt inadequate. My accent, background, and internal anxieties marked me as different. I learned how quickly environment shapes confidence. But I also learned that struggle forges resilience that comfort rarely does.

Instead of shrinking, I adapted. I observed social dynamics quietly. I refined my behavior, speech, and discipline—not to erase where I came from, but to ensure it did not limit where I was going. Adolescence became a period of strategic self-editing.

The Return to Football—This Time Safely

One unexpected gift of Mwaani Boys was the absence of criminal influence around sports. Here, football was simply football. The pitch was safe. The game was clean. I allowed myself to return to it.

Playing for the school team was therapeutic. It restored a part of me I had buried for survival. Football reintroduced discipline in a different form—teamwork, strategy, sacrifice. It reminded me that skill could exist without danger.

The lessons translated seamlessly into other areas of life. Just as each player must execute their role on the field, I began understanding the importance of responsibility within larger systems. This understanding would later resurface in my approach to software development and automation.

Friendship, Brotherhood, and Shared Ambition

During this formative stage, I solidified a friendship that would deeply influence my outlook—my bond with my best friend, Erick (not my brother). Though he lived in Kibra, his mindset stretched far beyond it.

We spoke often about escape—not physical escape, but *transcendence*. We believed that environment explained circumstances, not destiny. Our conversations reinforced ambition and accountability. Knowing someone else shared my mindset reassured me that aspiration was not foolish optimism, but strategic hope.

This friendship functioned as psychological reinforcement. When doubts surfaced, shared vision steadied me.

Masculinity and Responsibility

Adolescence also forced me to confront masculinity. Without a present father, I constructed my understanding of manhood from observation—of my brothers, teachers, coaches, and peers.

I learned that strength lies not in dominance, but in consistency. That discipline outlasts passion. That self-control is more impressive than bravado. I rejected the loud, reckless performances of masculinity often celebrated among young men and instead leaned toward quiet responsibility.

This internal definition of manhood anchored me through temptation. It influenced how I navigated authority, relationships, and ambition.

Academic Discipline and Fear of Regression

Fear followed me quietly. Fear of failure. Fear of wasting opportunity. Fear of returning to Kibra without progress. That fear was not paralyzing; it was motivating.

I studied seriously. I respected structure. I avoided unnecessary distractions. I was not perfect, but I was intentional. I learned that success is built through ordinary consistency rather than dramatic effort.

By the time KCSE arrived, I was prepared—not only academically, but psychologically. I had been shaped by pressure, expectation, and disciplined ambition.

The Threshold of Adulthood

Completing secondary school marked a significant psychological shift. I was no longer a child navigating survival. I was a young man standing at the threshold of adulthood with real choices ahead.

I carried good grades, renewed confidence, and a sense of purpose. University was now visible on the horizon—not as a fantasy, but as a reachable destination. Yet, I also carried a quiet arrogance—confidence that would later be tested severely.

This chapter closed with optimism, structure, and momentum. But life, as I would soon learn, does not progress linearly. The systems that protected me would soon loosen—and with freedom would come my greatest test.

CHAPTER FIVE: PERSONAL GROWTH & CURRENT SELF

Arrival in Nyeri: A False Sense of Arrival

Joining Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT) felt like victory. For the first time, I believed I had arrived. Leaving Nairobi and moving to the cool, misty hills of Nyeri symbolized not just academic progression, but personal triumph. I had survived Kibra, navigated secondary school successfully, and secured a place in a public university. In my mind, the hardest part was over.

That belief was mistaken.

Nyeri was quiet in a way that felt unnatural to me. The noise, urgency, and constant vigilance that shaped my upbringing disappeared almost overnight. For the first time in my life, there was no immediate pressure pushing me forward. That absence became dangerous.

I mistook freedom for success.

The Illusion of Independence

University introduced a level of independence I was unprepared for. No one monitored my attendance. No one checked whether I studied. No one enforced discipline beyond deadlines I assumed would bend.

The systems that had protected me—my mother’s vigilance, school structure, sponsorship oversight—gradually loosened. In their absence, I discovered a flaw I had ignored: I relied heavily on external accountability. When it disappeared, so did my discipline.

I began procrastinating. I attended classes inconsistently. I underestimated the rigor of technical coursework. I believed intelligence would compensate for effort.

It didn’t.

Complacency as Self-Sabotage

Complacency does not announce itself loudly. It arrives quietly—disguised as confidence. I convinced myself that passing was guaranteed. That effort could wait. That consequences would not be immediate.

I was wrong.

Assignments piled up. Concepts grew complex. Gaps in understanding widened. Instead of correcting course, I delayed. Avoidance became my coping mechanism. I was drifting academically while convincing myself I was still in control.

Looking back, this period reveals an uncomfortable truth: survival teaches resilience, but it does not automatically teach sustained discipline. That had to be learned the hard way.

The Fall: Academic Failure

Failure arrived without warning. Exam results were released, and reality became unavoidable. I had failed—badly. Not a minor setback, but a catastrophic collapse requiring repetition of an entire academic year.

The shock was physical. My chest tightened. My thoughts spiraled. I remember staring at the results, hoping they would change if I looked long enough.

They didn't.

For the first time in my life, my effort—or lack thereof—had publicly disqualified me. There was no external force to blame. No poverty, no fees, no environment. Just me.

Shame and Isolation

Shame followed quickly. Watching classmates advance while I remained behind was deeply humiliating. Every familiar face became a mirror reflecting my failure. I avoided conversations. I withdrew socially.

The hardest part was reporting the failure to my mother and to Manager Ken. Explaining academic failure after years of sacrifice felt like betrayal. Their disappointment was quiet—but heavy.

That year taught me something painful yet necessary: failure hurts more when you recognize its legitimacy.

Rock Bottom and Reflection

Repeating a year stripped me of arrogance. I was forced into silence and reflection. Without the distraction of progression, I confronted questions I had avoided:

Why had I stopped trying?

Who was I when nobody was watching?

What did I actually want?

I realized that talent had once again outpaced focus. The same lesson I learned in Kibra had resurfaced—this time with higher stakes.

Failure, I learned, is an honest teacher.

The Awakening: Rebuilding Discipline

Determined not to waste a second chance, I reset completely. I restructured my routines. I attended every class. I studied deliberately. I treated assignments as non-negotiable.

More importantly, I rebuilt character. I learned to do the work even when motivation was absent. Discipline became internal rather than enforced.

That year transformed my identity. I stopped seeing education as entitlement and began viewing it as stewardship—something entrusted to me temporarily.

Redefining Success

The repetition year reshaped my understanding of success. Progress without discipline is illusion. Freedom without structure breeds failure. True independence requires self-regulation.

I emerged sharper, humbler, and more focused. Failure had stripped me down and rebuilt me more deliberately.

That chapter marked the end of entitlement and the beginning of intentional adulthood.

CHAPTER SIX: FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

Entering BBIT Without a Vision

When I enrolled in the Bachelor of Business Information Technology (BBIT) program at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, I did so without a clear sense of purpose. The course represented opportunity more than passion. It was a logical choice—technology was relevant, employable, and versatile—but it was not yet personal.

At that time, I did not imagine myself as a technologist, engineer, or builder of systems. I saw BBIT as a means to an end: a degree that could unlock financial stability. My relationship with technology was functional, not inspired. I attended lectures because I had to, not because I was curious.

This lack of vision later contributed to my academic collapse. Without emotional investment, effort was inconsistent. The subjects remained abstract, detached from my identity and lived experience.

Relearning Education During the Repeat Year

The repetition year forced me to slow down and engage genuinely. For the first time, I stopped rushing toward graduation and started paying attention to *understanding*. I approached coursework differently—less defensively, more intentionally.

I began with web development. Learning how code could manipulate a browser window felt strangely empowering. The first time I wrote HTML and saw structure form on a screen, something clicked. This wasn't theory. This was creation.

That experience reframed learning. Technology stopped being intimidating and started becoming expressive.

From Curiosity to Obsession

As my competence grew, so did my curiosity. I moved from frontend aesthetics to backend logic—wanting to understand *why* things worked, not just *how* they looked. I became increasingly interested in databases, APIs, and system logic.

I began learning outside the classroom—late nights, online documentation, tutorials, forums. The more I learned, the more I realized how vast the field was. Technology became a space where effort translated directly into visible results.

This relationship felt familiar. It mirrored survival in Kibra: observe, adapt, improve. Technology rewarded discipline honestly.

Discovering Linux: Order in a Chaotic World

Linux introduced me to a system that made sense. Unlike graphical interfaces that obscured complexity, Linux was transparent. Commands executed precisely or failed honestly. There was no ambiguity.

This clarity resonated deeply with me. Growing up, chaos dominated my environment. Linux, in contrast, required structure, logic, and respect. It reminded me of discipline enforced without emotion.

I became comfortable navigating terminals, managing processes, and understanding system behavior. The system did not care where I came from—only whether I understood it. That neutrality was liberating.

The Transition Toward DevOps

As my skills matured, my interest shifted toward automation, deployment, and system reliability. I became fascinated by how software moved from development to production reliably. DevOps represented efficiency, foresight, and resilience—all traits I valued personally.

I was drawn to pipelines, continuous integration, infrastructure management, and monitoring. Automation felt like control over complexity. It was not flashy, but it was powerful.

DevOps felt less like a career path and more like alignment—with my mindset, upbringing, and temperament.

Technology as an Equalizer

One of the most powerful realizations during this phase was that technology does not discriminate. Code executes based on logic, not background. Competence is measured by output, not origin.

I could sit in Nyeri and build systems used anywhere in the world. Geography lost its dominance. Merit regained meaning.

This realization expanded my ambition. Technology was no longer a skill—it was leverage.

From Employment to Ownership

My goals evolved. I no longer wanted to simply be employable. I wanted to be independent. I envisioned building tools, systems, and eventually a company—one that solved real problems and created opportunities.

The dream is ambitious and intimidating, but grounded. I understand risk. I understand failure. But I also understand persistence.

Where others see uncertainty, I see iteration.

Education Reframed

Today, I view education not as an obligation, but as a foundation. University exposed me to concepts, failure, recovery, and direction. BBIT did not give me all the answers—but it taught me how to seek them.

This chapter marks the transformation from passive student to intentional learner. From confusion to clarity. From consumption to creation.

CHAPTER SEVEN: A LETTER TO MY FUTURE SELF

Dear Mateli,

If you are reading this, then time has passed—and that alone means you survived. I am writing this version of you from a space of transition, not arrival. You are not where you want to be yet, but you are no longer where you started. This letter exists to anchor you, to remind you of the truths learned when life was loud, heavy, and unforgiving.

I hope you have not forgotten Laini Saba.

Not as a place of pain, but as the furnace that shaped your resilience. Remember the mud walls, the leaking roof, and the constant awareness that nothing was guaranteed. Remember that hunger sharpened your focus, and scarcity taught you discipline before ambition ever did. If life has grown comfortable for you now, do not allow comfort to erase hunger—not for food, but for purpose.

Remember Where Your Strength Came From

You were not self-made. Do not rewrite history to flatter your ego.

Your strength came from a praying mother who bent her knees on a mud floor when she had nothing else to offer. It came from brothers who sacrificed silently so you could walk lighter. It came from a sponsor who believed in your future before you understood its weight yourself.

If success has found you, wear it humbly. You owe it to Simon, to Erick, and to the version of yourself who walked away from temptation when it would have been easier to stay.

Never forget Erick walking from Eastleigh to Kibra. If exhaustion tempts you to quit, remember that image. You promised yourself that you would never waste opportunity—and that promise still binds you.

Do Not Romanticize the Struggle—But Respect It

If you have moved far from struggle, do not pretend you miss it. Struggle is not holy. It is harsh. But respect it for what it taught you.

It taught you to think ahead.

It taught you to sacrifice short-term pleasure for long-term survival.

It taught you that discipline outlives motivation.

If success has softened you, revisit this letter.

Guard Your Focus Relentlessly

You already learned this lesson once—painfully.

You lost a year because you mistook freedom for arrival. Because you assumed opportunity would sustain itself without effort. Promise yourself you will never repeat that mistake in a different form—through complacency, distraction, or ego.

Focus is your greatest asset. Talent without focus nearly cost you everything once. Let that memory keep you sharp.

If you are building systems, companies, or leading others now, remember: systems fail when discipline erodes. So do people.

Technology Is Your Tool, Not Your Identity

If you are deep into DevOps now—building pipelines, automating infrastructure, orchestrating systems—do not confuse skill with purpose.

Technology empowered you because it was fair. It did not care where you came from. But remember why you were drawn to it in the first place: not for status, but for control over complexity. For structure in a chaotic world.

Let technology remain a means to solve problems, not a pedestal for ego.

Measure Success Differently

If money has found you, use it wisely. If it hasn't yet, do not panic. You learned patience early.

Success for you was never meant to be loud. It was meant to be **responsible**.

Success is being able to say yes when someone needs help.
Success is becoming the “Manager Ken” for someone else.
Success is lifting others without announcing it.

If you achieve more than your brothers, do not boast. If you achieve less, do not despair. Honor them by building well, not by competing noisily.

Stay Grounded Spiritually, Even If Quietly

Your faith was never performative. Keep it that way.

You do not need loud declarations or religious validation. You know what prayer did for you when nothing else worked. Hold onto gratitude. Hold onto humility. Hold onto accountability.

Distance yourself from hypocrisy, but never from grace.

Do Not Abandon Your People

If Kibra feels far away now, remember—it is not behind you, it is *within* you. Your growth was never meant to sever roots. It was meant to extend branches back toward them.

Return—not necessarily physically, but through opportunity, mentorship, and sponsorship. That is how cycles are broken.

Finally, Be Patient With Yourself

You are still becoming.
Do not rush the process.
Do not compare timelines.
Do not let fear convince you that you are late.

You survived what should have buried you. Whatever comes next is manageable.

Stay disciplined. Stay grateful. Stay honest.

You are not done yet.

Sincerely,

Mateli — the version that refused to quit

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Looking Back Without Living There

This autobiographical journey has traced a path from the narrow corridors of Laini Saba, Kibra, to the structured academic environment of Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. It has explored not just movement across physical spaces, but transformation across mental, emotional, and moral landscapes. Each chapter has examined a stage of life not in isolation, but as part of a continuous process of becoming.

Looking back, I do not view my past with bitterness. Neither do I romanticize it. The struggles of my upbringing were neither punishments nor privileges; they were conditions that demanded response. What matters most is not what I was born into, but how I interpreted and navigated it. The mud house, the scarcity, the uncertainty—they did not end my story. They shaped the lens through which I now see the world.

The Meaning of Resilience

Resilience emerges throughout this narrative as more than endurance. It is adaptability. It is the quiet decision to remain functional in environments designed to break you. It is choosing discipline when no one is watching, effort when reward is delayed, and integrity when shortcuts are available.

Resilience sustained me when opportunity was scarce. It also rescued me when opportunity was abundant but mismanaged. Failing at university was a critical reminder that resilience is not a one-time achievement; it must be renewed continually. This lesson redefined my understanding of strength—not as constant success, but as the capacity to recover, reflect, and recalibrate.

The Role of Community and Grace

One of the clearest truths that emerges from this story is that individual effort, while important, is insufficient alone. My life is evidence of communal investment and unearned grace. My mother's sacrifices, my brothers' example, and Manager Ken's sponsorship form the unseen scaffolding that supported my progress.

Their influence challenges the idea of the "self-made" individual. I am not self-made. I am community-made. Recognizing this truth imposes responsibility. It demands humility

in success and generosity in progress. It insists that achievement must eventually translate into service.

Failure as Instruction

The turning point of my academic failure was not a detour—it was a recalibration. It dismantled entitlement, sharpened focus, and forced me to confront the consequences of complacency. That failure did not diminish my potential; it refined it.

Through repetition and reflection, I learned that success is sustained through consistency, not excitement. Discipline, not intelligence, became my defining differentiator. This realization continues to guide how I approach learning, work, and ambition.

Identity Reconstructed

This journey also documents the gradual construction of identity. From a boy defined by survival to a young man guided by intention, my sense of self has evolved alongside experience. I no longer measure myself solely by escape from poverty or accumulation of achievement. I measure myself by growth, responsibility, and contribution.

My relationship with faith reflects this evolution. It remains present, but quieter—less performative, more internal. My values are grounded in gratitude, accountability, and humility rather than image or validation.

Education as a Foundation, Not a Destination

Completing my degree does not signal completion of learning. Rather, it marks the establishment of a foundation. Education, for me, has shifted from credential acquisition to skill development and character refinement. The BBIT program did not define my future, but it equipped me to pursue it intentionally.

Technology, particularly DevOps and automation, has become both a tool and a philosophy—structured, precise, and resilient. It mirrors the lessons of my upbringing: systems must be maintained, monitored, and improved continuously.

Facing Forward With Responsibility

As I stand at the threshold of graduation, I do so with clarity rather than certainty. The future remains unpredictable. However, I am no longer intimidated by uncertainty. My life has trained me to operate within it.

My ambition extends beyond personal success. I aspire to create opportunities, build systems that serve people, and contribute to breaking cycles of limitation. If my journey proves anything, it is that intervention—whether through education, mentorship, or belief—can alter trajectories significantly.

A Journey Without a Final Line

This autobiography does not conclude a story; it documents a phase. The boy from Laini Saba still lives within the man finishing university—not as a source of pain, but as a reminder of origin and purpose. The future will introduce new challenges, and I will likely fail again in different ways. What matters is not avoidance of failure, but the discipline to learn from it.

I end this reflection grounded in gratitude, sharpened by experience, and committed to growth. The journey continues—not with certainty, but with intention.

This is not the final version of my life.
It is simply the most recent build.