



# GITONGA KANANA LUCKSHAKIRA

Autobiography

## ABSTRACT

This autobiography captures the key moments that have shaped my life, from childhood to my professional journey. It explores the challenges I've faced, the lessons learned, and the influence of my cultural heritage. Through these reflections, I offer a candid account of my growth, aspirations, and the experiences that have defined who I am today.

## SHAKIRA

CAPSTONE PROJECT.

# GITONGA KANANA LUCKSHAKIRA

My name is Gitonga Kanana Luckshakira, though many also know me as Eve, my baptismal name. You might be curious about the origin of the rather unique name "Luckshakira." Well, I've spent a fair share of my lifetime fielding the question, "Where did your parents get your name from?" And truth be told, the story behind it is quite the unexpected journey.

For the longest time, whenever asked, my parents would simply say they conjured up the name out of thin air. It was one of those whimsical decisions, or so I thought. Interestingly, my birth coincided with the release of the song "Hips Don't Lie" by Shakira, adding a touch of serendipity to the narrative. I often attributed the "luck" part to my mother's creative flair.

However, as fate would have it, my mother recently confided in me the real inspiration behind my name. It turns out, "Shakira" was borrowed from a neighbour my mother once knew. The "luck" part, well, that's her imaginative twist. So, you could say I owe my moniker to a blend of happenstance and maternal ingenuity.

Now, "Kanana," on the other hand, is a name I proudly inherited from my Meru grandmother. Its meaning resonates deeply with me it signifies someone who adores being pampered and is cherished by others. It's a sentiment that aligns perfectly with my own affinities and personality traits.

As for "luck," it's pretty straightforward it denotes good fortune. And funnily enough, I've always had a distinct sense of being blessed with luck in various aspects of my life. And "Shakira," well, it means "thankful," which holds a special significance for me.

So, in essence, my name is a mosaic of chance encounters, maternal inspiration, and cultural heritage—a story that unfolds with layers of meaning and personal connections. And despite the whimsical origins, I've come to embrace and cherish every facet of my name, for it reflects the unique journey that has shaped me into who I am today.

I am a 21-year-old woman born on March 10, 2003, in Maua, a small town nestled in Meru. My parents, Benson Gitonga and Beatrice Kagwiria, have blessed me with a loving family dynamic a perfect blend, if you ask me. Alongside me, there are two wonderful siblings who complete our familial trio. Firstly, there's my younger brother, Collins Muraguri Gitonga, who's currently 15 years old and navigating his way through Form 2 at Meru School. He's carving his path in academia with determination and zeal, always striving to excel in his studies. Collins has a curious mind and a passion for learning that makes us all proud. Then, there's my adorable sister, Shanice Ntinyari Gitonga, the apple of our family's eye. At just 6 years old, she's the epitome of joy and entertainment, spreading smiles wherever she goes. Currently in PP2, she's embarking on her educational journey with enthusiasm and curiosity. Shanice's boundless energy and infectious laughter light up our home, reminding us all of

the simple joys in life.

Together, the three of us form a tight-knit unit, each bringing our unique personalities and perspectives to the table. Our shared experiences, laughter, and occasional squabbles have woven the fabric of our bond, making our family a sanctuary of love and support amidst life's adventures. We support each other in every endeavour, celebrate each other's successes, and provide comfort during challenging times. My parents have always emphasized the importance of education, hard work, and integrity, values that have been instilled in each of us. They have created an environment where we feel encouraged to pursue our dreams and aspirations. Their unwavering support and guidance have been the cornerstone of our growth and development. Growing up in Maua has given me a deep appreciation for community and simplicity. The town's serene environment and close-knit community have been instrumental in shaping my values and outlook on life. The sense of belonging and the relationships we've built here are invaluable.

Reflecting on my journey so far, I feel incredibly fortunate to have such a complete and loving family. Our bond is a source of strength and comfort, providing a solid foundation as I navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. My family's unwavering support and love have given me the confidence to pursue my goals and dreams with determination and resilience. As I continue my journey, I carry with me the lessons and values imparted by my parents, the memories and laughter shared with my siblings, and the love that binds us all together. I am grateful for the blessing of a complete and supportive family, and I look forward to the many adventures and milestones we will share in the future.

I find joy in a myriad of activities, each adding its own unique flavour to the tapestry of my life. Foremost, I cherish moments spent with loved ones, revelling in the laughter and camaraderie shared with friends and family. Whether it's a cozy gathering at home, filled with shared stories and hearty laughter, or an exhilarating adventure exploring new places together, their presence infuses every moment with warmth and vitality. Spending time with loved ones provides a sense of belonging and comfort that is irreplaceable. I also find joy in solo activities that allow me to unwind and reflect. Equally, I am drawn to the rich tapestry of African literature and poetry, finding solace and inspiration in the vivid narratives and profound insights they offer. Writing, too, is a cherished activity, allowing me to express my thoughts and creativity, and often serving as a therapeutic outlet.

Physical activities also play a significant role in my life. I enjoy hiking and nature walks, which offer not only physical exercise but also a chance to connect with the natural world and find peace in its beauty. Nature holds a special place in my heart, beckoning me to explore its wonders through leisurely walks, invigorating hikes, and refreshing swims. There's a profound sense of serenity and connection that envelops me amidst the beauty of the outdoors, rejuvenating my spirit with each step. Dancing, even if just in my room to my favourite tunes, brings immense joy and a sense of freedom. These activities keep me grounded and contribute to my overall well-being. In addition to these, I find joy in learning and self-improvement. Whether it's picking up a new skill, delving into a new area of

knowledge, or working on personal projects, the pursuit of growth and knowledge brings a deep sense of fulfillment. This has been particularly true in my journey with web development and technology, where each new discovery and skill acquired adds to my confidence and passion for the field.

Humour, to me, is a tonic for the soul. I delight in good jokes, relishing the contagious laughter they evoke and the lightness they bring to life's moments. Feminism is not just an ideology but a fervent belief in the inherent equality and empowerment of all genders. It fuels my passion for justice and drives me to advocate for gender equity and inclusivity in all facets of life. Conversely, there are few things that dampen my spirits. Chief among them is boredom, which stifles creativity and stifles the vibrancy of life. Additionally, I find it challenging to be around closed-minded individuals whose rigidity limits the exchange of ideas and perspectives. And of course, a dearth of good jokes leaves me longing for the light-hearted moments that infuse joy into everyday life.

Finally, volunteering and participating in community service activities bring a profound sense of purpose and satisfaction. Engaging in projects that make a positive impact, whether through my involvement in the Rotaract Club or other initiatives, adds a meaningful dimension to my life. These experiences not only help others but also enrich my own life, fostering a sense of connection and responsibility towards the community. In all these activities, whether shared with loved ones or pursued individually, I find a vibrant and fulfilling life. Each experience adds its own colour and texture, making the tapestry of my life rich and varied. The joy derived from these moments fuels my spirit and motivates me to embrace each day with enthusiasm and gratitude. In essence, my likes and dislikes paint a picture of a person who seeks joy in connection, finds solace in nature and literature, and advocates for equality and empowerment. Each preference, whether embraced or not, shapes the contours of my journey and adds depth to my experiences.

When asked about my hobbies, I usually respond that I'm not sure because it depends on many factors such as my mood, recent events, my environment, or even the weather. My interests are quite varied and can shift based on how I'm feeling or what's happening around me. When it comes to sports, I casually mention lawn tennis as my favorite since it's the only game I've ever attempted to learn. However, I've never actually played outside of practice sessions. Despite this, I find joy in peaceful short runs, which positively impact both my mental and physical well-being. Choosing a favorite color is also a challenge for me, as I'm torn between lilac purple and green. When it comes to topics like football or cars, I often feel out of place since I don't have much knowledge about either, even though there seems to be an expectation to know at least something about one of them. As for my favorite meal, I don't have a specific dish that stands out. However, any meal that includes good meat tends to qualify as a favorite. My taste in music is also quite diverse; I can't pinpoint a favorite artist, but I can always tell you which song I've had on repeat for the past couple of days.

I consider myself to have a diverse personality. I enjoy trying new things, and often end up

liking many of the activities or experiences I try. This makes it difficult for me to choose a single favorite in any category. I find joy in the variety and the excitement of new experiences, which keeps my life interesting and fulfilling. This variety in my interests means that my answer to what my favorite hobby or sport is might change frequently. The same goes for my favorite color, music, or food. While some people might find comfort in having a few steadfast favorites, I relish the flexibility to explore and enjoy a broad spectrum of activities and tastes. This adaptability keeps me engaged and open to new experiences, which I believe enriches my life in many ways. In conclusion, my inability to choose a single favorite stems from my appreciation for diversity in my experiences and tastes. I find joy in exploration and discovery, which allows me to continuously learn and grow. This makes my life a vibrant tapestry of various interests and passions, each adding its own unique color and texture.

My early childhood unfolded in the heart of Ura village, a middle-class haven during the early 2000s. This tranquil setting provided the perfect backdrop for a childhood rich in experiences and lessons. My father, a dedicated primary school educator, imparted not only knowledge but also wisdom and moral values at the nearby Amungent'i Primary School. His commitment to education and the betterment of young minds was a constant source of inspiration. My mother, on the other hand, was the epitome of resilience and ambition. Balancing her teaching profession with the pursuit of further education, she was a role model of determination. Her entrepreneurial spirit also shone brightly as she managed to wear many hats: a diligent salonist, a nurturing farmer, and a loving mother. Her multifaceted roles illustrated the power of hard work and versatility, lessons that left an indelible mark on me.

Growing up, I was enveloped in the warmth and camaraderie of my extended family, primarily centered around my grandfather's expansive compound. This vibrant tapestry of love and togetherness was where generations coalesced, creating a rich social landscape. Surrounded by cousins, uncles, and aunties, each day was infused with a sense of community that shaped my social skills and outlook on life. Fond memories of my childhood often revolve around the jovial presence of my late grandfather, Fredrick Ntongo'ndu. His laughter and affection were a source of immense joy. I can vividly recall regaling him with my childlike jokes and antics, basking in his hearty laughter. The verdant expanse of his coffee plantation was a playground where life pulsed with activity. It was amidst this lush greenery that I found solace in exploration and play.

Each day was an adventure waiting to unfold. Whether climbing up trees to pluck fruits, navigating the terrain with a wheelbarrow, or engaging in spirited games with friends and cousins, my days were filled with excitement and discovery. I was an ardent fan of childhood games, revelling in the simple joys of laughter and mischief. These moments of pure, unbridled fun were the essence of my youth. My exuberance, however, occasionally landed me in hot water with my parents. I was often reprimanded for returning home late, my clothes adorned with dirt from head to toe, or for getting lost in the enchantment of play, neglecting the call for meals. Yet, every scolding and admonition paled in comparison to the boundless joy derived from those carefree moments. Unfettered by societal norms or

gender stereotypes, I embraced every facet of childhood with unbridled enthusiasm. I challenged conventions, forging my path with courage and curiosity. This spirit of adventure and the values instilled by my parents and extended family have continued to shape my journey, grounding me in the lessons of my early years while propelling me toward new horizons.

My formative years were enriched by invaluable lessons learnt from the vibrant tapestry of my grandfather's farm. Amidst the expanse of coffee plantations and the bustle of local factories, I embarked on a journey of discovery, immersing myself in the intricacies of agriculture. Coffee plucking and processing became more than just chores; they were windows into the intricate world of farming. From observing the meticulous process at the local factory to sneaking ripe coffee berries into my mouth, I absorbed the nuances of coffee cultivation with eager fascination. Beyond coffee, our farm boasted an abundance of agricultural marvels, a symphony of khat, banana, maize, and beans plantations, intermingled with sugarcane, mangoes, avocados, and an array of verdant vegetables. Our sustenance was rooted in the bountiful harvests of our shamba, where fresh produce abounded, nourishing both body and soul.

In our humble kitchen, traditional fare took centre stage, with Mukinde reigning supreme. Crafted from a medley of maize flour, beans, vegetables, and potatoes, this hearty dish bore the hallmark of my grandmother's culinary prowess. Its aroma wafting through the air was a testament to the love and care woven into every spoonful. Equally cherished was my grandmother's porridge, a concoction of sorghum and millet, lovingly fermented to perfection. Its rich, earthy flavour was a comforting embrace on chilly mornings, a testament to the age-old traditions that bound us to our land and heritage. However, amidst the culinary delights, there existed a culinary nemesis, Ruro. This peculiar porridge, derived from boiled arrowroot plant leaves, elicited a visceral aversion with its pungent taste and curious green hue. Its presence served as a reminder that even amidst the bounty of nature, not all flavours were destined to be savoured. Looking back, my upbringing amidst the bounty of our farm instilled in me a profound appreciation for the intricacies of agriculture and the nourishing embrace of tradition. Each harvest, each meal, bore witness to the enduring legacy of hard work, resilience, and the timeless bond between man and land.

I also spent some of my holidays with my grandmother who lived on the outskirts of Meru town, in a place called Kithaku. Life in Kithaku was markedly different from the one I knew in Ura village. The weather was colder, and instead of spending my days playing with my cousins, I would stay close to my grandmother as she picked tea on the massive farms. It was here that I learned the delicate art of picking tea leaves, helping her fill her basket faster so we could head back home together. These moments were a mix of hard work and precious bonding time. I found a unique sense of enjoyment in spending time on the tea farms. Occasionally, I would spot stray elephants near the fences of a nearby reserve. The sight of these massive creatures was mesmerizing, and I could spend hours watching them in awe. Their presence added an element of wonder and adventure to my visits, making each trip to Kithaku memorable.

Kithaku was not only known for its tea but also for its diverse crops and fruits, especially plums. I loved plucking these juicy fruits, savouring their sweetness, and saving some to bring back to my cousins in Maua. This simple act of collecting and sharing fruits created a delightful connection between my experiences in Kithaku and my life in Ura, reinforcing the joy of family bonds. During my times in Kithaku, I also had the opportunity to learn the Imenti language, which had a more melodious tone compared to the Igembe language I was accustomed to. This linguistic discovery was fascinating, adding a new dimension to my cultural understanding. Additionally, I learned new games and made new friends, enriching my social experience and broadening my horizons. Each visit to Kithaku was a blend of hard work, quiet reflection, and simple pleasures. These holidays were not just about escaping the familiar but also about embracing new experiences and learning from them. My time with my grandmother taught me the value of diligence, the beauty of nature, and the importance of family ties, lessons that have remained with me throughout my life.

In addition to the warmth of home, my childhood was also coloured by the solemnity of our local church. Raised in a devout Catholic household, faith was a big part of my upbringing, shaping my worldview and instilling a sense of reverence for the divine. Sunday mornings were a sacred ritual with hymns that resonated through the Sunday school hall, filling the air with melody and devotion. Amidst the chorus of voices, I loved the simple joys of sweet treats, shared amongst friends, as we eagerly awaited the teachings of our stern yet beloved Sunday school teacher. Her unwavering discipline served as a guiding light, steering us towards the path of righteousness with firm yet gentle hands. As I embarked on my catechism classes, a sense of anticipation coursed through my veins, each lesson bringing me closer to the coveted prize of receiving Holy Communion.

The culmination of my catechism classes was a momentous occasion, a rite of passage that filled me with joy and reverence. To partake in the sacrament amidst the congregation was a privilege I cherished, a tangible affirmation of my faith and devotion. Yet, it wasn't just solemnity that defined my church experience; Saturdays brought a lively symphony of laughter and dance, as we gathered for practice sessions and childhood games. Amidst the spirited rhythms and shared laughter, friendships blossomed, fortified by shared experience. The church shop, with its array of rosaries and religious artifacts, held a special allure for me. I adorned myself with intricate rosaries, symbols of my unwavering devotion, and in moments of whimsy, entertained thoughts of a life dedicated to serving the divine as a nun. Indeed, my time at church was more than mere religious observance; it was a tapestry of memories woven with threads of faith, friendship, and personal growth. It nurtured my spirit, enriched my soul, and left an indelible mark on my journey of self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. In retrospect, I recognize the profound impact that my church community had on shaping my values, beliefs, and sense of belonging, an integral part of my childhood and upbringing that I hold dear to this day.

My educational journey commenced in 2006, at the age of three, when I embarked on my first steps into the realm of learning. Saint John's Boarding and Day School, located near our home, became my haven of discovery and friendships. To my youthful eyes, school was a vibrant playground, a realm where knowledge intertwined with laughter and friendships

bloomed amidst the innocence of childhood. In the tapestry of nursery school memories, games reigned supreme, weaving threads of joy and camaraderie into the fabric of our days. Amongst our favourite pastimes was the whimsical enactment of weddings, where we gleefully assumed roles, bedecked in imaginary finery, and danced to the rhythm of our imaginations. From the elaborate decorations to the make-believe feast, each moment was steeped in mirth and shared delight, punctuated only by the lament of the bell signalling the end of our cherished break-time.

Amidst the laughter and play, Miss Muthoni, our beloved teacher, gently introduced us to the wonders of numbers, letters, and the art of writing. With patience and kindness, she nurtured our fledgling intellects, guiding us through the labyrinth of early education with a tender hand. Her dedication and warmth created an environment where learning felt like a grand adventure, each lesson a new discovery. Yet, even amidst the joys of discovery, there lurked the inevitability of naptime, an afternoon ritual enforced with a pinch for the stubborn few. Though met with reluctance at times, those enforced moments of respite now stand as nostalgic echoes of a simpler time, fondly remembered amidst the complexities of adulthood. Looking back, as I navigate the corridors of academia, I find myself reminiscing about those happy days of nursery school, where the pursuit of knowledge was adorned with the innocence of youth.

In the midst of rigorous afternoon chemistry classes, I often found myself longing for the days of forced afternoon naps. Those simple, enforced breaks from the day's activities now serve as a gentle reminder of the fleeting nature of childhood and the enduring allure of simpler times. The structure and simplicity of those early days, where learning was seamlessly woven with play and rest, have left an indelible mark on my heart. Reflecting on these memories, I realize how foundational those early experiences were. Miss Muthoni's gentle guidance and the rhythm of nursery school life laid the groundwork for my academic journey, infusing it with a sense of wonder and curiosity. These cherished moments remind me to find balance and joy in my current pursuits, appreciating the beauty of learning and the importance of rest. The lessons from those nursery school days continue to resonate, teaching me that the quest for knowledge is a lifelong journey, best approached with a blend of curiosity, playfulness, and the occasional pause to rest and reflect.

In 2008, my constant prayer for a baby brother was finally answered. At the time, I had no idea how children actually came into the world, but I believed they were delivered by planes. So, every time a plane flew over our home, I would scream and sing, hoping it would drop me a baby brother. Every day after school, I would climb a hill in our compound and say a Hail Mary, asking Mary to grant me my wish. Being young and naive, I didn't notice any changes in my mother's body. One morning, when I woke up and found my father making tea, I asked about my mother's whereabouts. I vividly remember that cup of tea, sweetened with more sugar than usual, showing that it wasn't made by our regular cook. My dad eventually answered my persistent questions and told me that my mum had been taken by a plane. I can't recall my exact thoughts at that moment, but later that week, I visited my



mother in the hospital and found her with a very fair skinned baby. I finally had my baby brother. I was overwhelmed with emotion and couldn't keep my hands off him. I was ecstatic about him and the fulfillment of my prayer.

As we grew up together, we had our share of fights over random things, but I never hated him. These were just typical sibling squabbles, likely a way of seeking attention or expressing ourselves. Despite the arguments, my love for him remained constant. Collins, as he was named, quickly became the centre of our family's universe. His arrival marked a joyous new chapter, filled with laughter and a renewed sense of togetherness. From the very beginning, I took on the role of a protective older sister, always watching out for him and making sure he was safe and happy.

Our childhood was a blend of playful adventures and learning experiences. We spent countless hours exploring the outdoors, creating imaginary worlds, and sharing secrets. There were times when we disagreed, often over trivial matters like toys or television shows, but these arguments were fleeting and quickly forgotten. They were part and parcel of growing up together, and each squabble only served to strengthen our bond. Collins had a knack for bringing joy and laughter into our lives. His infectious smile and curious nature made every day an adventure. I took pride in teaching him new things, from walking to reading his first words. Seeing him grow and develop his own personality was a source of immense joy for me.

Our parents played a significant role in nurturing our sibling bond. They encouraged us to support each other, share our experiences, and resolve conflicts amicably. Their guidance helped us understand the importance of family and the enduring nature of sibling relationships. As I look back on those early years, I realize how much Collins has influenced my life. He taught me patience, responsibility, the true meaning of unconditional love and even how to ride a bike. Even now, as we navigate our individual paths, the bond we forged in childhood remains unbreakable. Our shared memories and the love we have for each other continue to be a source of strength and comfort.

In the grand tapestry of life, my prayer for a baby brother was not just answered; it was fulfilled in the most beautiful way. Collins is not just my brother; he is a cherished friend, a confidant, and a constant reminder of the blessings that come from faith and family. As we continue to grow and face new challenges, I am confident that our bond will only grow stronger, enriched by the love and experiences we share.

It was also during that period that my journey through formal education continued as I entered Class One at Saint John's Primary School, a place where the spirit of education, ethics, and religion were deeply ingrained in the fabric of everyday life. This institution imparted not just academic knowledge, but also instilled in me a set of values that have remained steadfast companions throughout my journey. Primary school was a rollercoaster ride of ups and downs, particularly when I transitioned to boarding school in Class Five. The day began with the relentless clang of the church bell at 5:30 am, a sound that became the

unwelcome herald of another day filled with challenges. Rising early was non-negotiable; tardiness, even by a mere few minutes, invited swift discipline. Thus, I learned the art of swift preparation to evade the repercussions of being late.

Boarding school life came with its own set of trials: the abrupt transition to independence at a tender age, the pangs of homesickness, and the unpalatable meal plans, among others. The sudden shift to living away from my family was challenging, forcing me to grow up quickly and adapt to a new level of self-reliance. I missed the comfort and familiarity of home, the warm meals prepared by my mother, and the reassuring presence of my siblings. Yet, amidst the hardships, I found solace in the camaraderie of friends. We bonded over shared experiences, supported each other through the tough times, and celebrated our small victories together. These friendships provided a sense of belonging and community, which was crucial in navigating the challenges of boarding school life.

Structured study sessions were another silver lining in the otherwise rigid routine. These sessions afforded ample time for completing assignments and preparing for exams. The disciplined environment, though strict, helped me develop good study habits and a strong work ethic. I learned the importance of time management, prioritizing tasks, and staying focused, skills that have been invaluable throughout my academic journey and beyond. The school also placed a strong emphasis on extracurricular activities, encouraging us to explore and develop our talents. Whether it was participating in sports, joining the school choir, or engaging in various clubs, these activities provided a much-needed break from the academic grind and allowed us to discover our passions and interests.

Reflecting on my primary school years, I realize that they were a formative period that shaped my character and prepared me for future challenges. The values of discipline, resilience, and camaraderie that I learned at Saint John's Primary School have continued to guide me through subsequent phases of my education and life. As I look back, I am grateful for the experiences and lessons learned during those early years. They laid a strong foundation for my personal and academic growth, equipping me with the tools and mindset needed to navigate the complexities of life. While the journey was not always easy, it was filled with moments of learning, growth, and cherished memories that have left a lasting impact on who I am today.

As I acclimatized to boarding school life, my focus sharpened on achieving my aspirations, chief among them securing admission to Alliance Girls' High School, an institution known for academic excellence. This goal became the beacon that guided my efforts and determination throughout my primary school years. My academic interests were diverse. I had a deep love for literature and composition, finding joy in the power of words and the art of storytelling. Science fascinated me with its explanations of the natural world, and Kiswahili intrigued me with its linguistic beauty and cultural significance. However, mathematics was a different story; I grappled with its complexities and often found it challenging to master the abstract concepts.

My career aspirations evolved like shifting sands, influenced by the myriad possibilities presented before me. At times, I entertained the thought of following in the footsteps of my parents and becoming a teacher, inspired by the impactful role they played in shaping young minds. Other times, I envisioned a career in journalism, inspired by prominent media personalities whose work I admired. The idea of becoming a journalist appealed to my love for storytelling and my desire to inform and engage the public. There were also moments when I contemplated the esteemed paths of law and neurosurgery. The thought of becoming a lawyer captivated me with the idea of advocating for justice and making a significant impact on society. On the other hand, the field of neurosurgery fascinated me with its blend of intricate science and the potential to change lives through medical innovation and also since everyone mentioned it as a career aspiration. These dreams and aspirations were not static; they danced with the winds of possibility, each new experience and piece of knowledge adding another layer to my ambitions. This fluidity in my career goals reflected my desire to explore various fields and find a path that resonated with my passions and strengths.

Despite the uncertainties and shifting dreams, my resolve to achieve academic excellence remained steadfast. I knew that securing a place at Alliance Girls' High School would open doors to numerous opportunities and provide a solid foundation for whichever career path I eventually chose. This goal motivated me to persevere through the challenges, from the early mornings and rigorous study sessions to overcoming my struggles with mathematics. As I reflect on those years, I recognize the importance of allowing oneself the freedom to dream and explore. Each aspiration, whether fleeting or enduring, contributed to my growth and understanding of the world. They taught me to remain open to possibilities, adapt to new information, and continually strive for excellence.

In the end, the journey itself filled with its highs and lows, successes and setbacks was instrumental in shaping my character and preparing me for the future. It instilled in me a resilience and determination that continue to drive me as I pursue my goals, both academic and professional. While the path ahead may still be uncertain, I am confident in my ability to navigate it, drawing on the lessons learned and the dreams that continue to inspire me.

The Kenya Certificate of Primary Education Examinations (KCPE) loomed as the pinnacle of my primary school journey, a test that held the key to my transition to secondary education. The intensity of preparation was palpable, as we were spurred on by the collective pursuit of securing placements in reputable high schools. Every day was a testament to resilience, marked by rigorous testing, mentorship programs, and the occasional sting of failure. Finally, in December 2016, my primary school chapter drew to a close with the conclusion of the KCPE examinations. As I awaited the outcome, a mix of excitement and anticipation coursed through me, fuelled by the prospect of embarking on the next chapter of my academic life. The echoes of my elder cousin's tales of secondary school adventures only added to my eagerness to embrace the new experiences that lay ahead.

In January 2017, I achieved a major milestone by joining Alliance Girls' High School, my dream school. The anticipation and excitement were palpable, and I eagerly awaited the beginning of this new chapter in my life. The school is located in Kikuyu, Kiambu County, approximately 300 kilometres from home, making each journey to and from school a six-hour trip. Despite the long travel time, I always enjoyed the beautiful landscapes along the way.

My first day at school was filled with activities. We had to leave home very early to ensure we arrived on time, completed all the necessary procedures, and allowed my parents to return home before it got too late. This experience was a testament to my parents' unwavering love and support. They spent the entire day with me, offering continuous words of encouragement as we navigated the long queues. Throughout the day, I couldn't help but notice the curious glances from others, likely due to my small stature and oversized uniform, which made me stand out. However, I had grown accustomed to comments about my height and was no longer bothered by them. The excitement of finally being at my dream school far outweighed any discomfort, and I felt ready to embrace this new journey with enthusiasm and determination.

Alliance Girls' High School is renowned for its academic excellence, and I quickly realized the high standards expected of us. The rigorous coursework was challenging, but the supportive teachers and collaborative learning environment made it manageable. I learned to balance my studies with extracurricular activities, finding joy in both. One of the most enriching aspects of my time at Alliance Girls' was meeting new people from diverse backgrounds. It was fascinating to learn how different our life experiences were. Each student was bright and self-driven, creating an inspiring environment that motivated me to strive for excellence. It was during this time that I realized how prevalent mother tongue accents were. Coming from a different linguistic background, I struggled with the pronunciation of certain letters, particularly 'h' and 'a'. This sometimes led to awkward situations and occasional laughter from my peers. To avoid mispronunciations, I often chose to stay silent, which was a new and challenging experience for me. Despite these initial struggles, I was determined to overcome this barrier. With a lot of corrections, fear, and practice, I gradually improved my pronunciation.

Over time, I gained confidence in my ability to communicate effectively, which was a significant personal victory. These experiences taught me valuable lessons about resilience and perseverance. The challenges I faced with language were just one part of my journey at Alliance Girls'. They helped me develop a thicker skin and a stronger resolve to overcome obstacles. Each correction and every practice session brought me closer to mastering the language nuances, and with that, a greater sense of self-assurance.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my time at Alliance Girls' was the friendships I formed. Being surrounded by like minded peers who shared my passion for learning and personal growth was inspiring. These connections added a rich, social dimension to my high school experience. Among the many friends I made, one girl stood out, Christine Kendi. She quickly

became my closest friend. We shared so many similarities in experiences and features that even some teachers would confuse us for each other. Kendi was not only beautiful but also incredibly bright. If I were ever to go missing, you would just have to look for her. Kendi's presence made high school much more enjoyable. She had an infectious sense of humour, sharing jokes, past experiences, and wild thoughts that never failed to entertain me. Her lively spirit and positivity were a constant source of joy. High school would not have been the same without her, and I cherish the memories we created together.

Beyond my dear friend Kendi, I was fortunate to have a wide circle of friends who were always encouraging, celebrating, and helping each other grow. This supportive network was crucial during our high school years, providing a sense of community and belonging that made the journey much more enjoyable and manageable. We kept each other company through the ups and downs, always ready to lend a hand or a kind word when needed. These friendships were integral to my personal growth. Being surrounded by such a dynamic and supportive group of peers taught me the importance of friendships and mutual support. We learned together, laughed together, and faced challenges together, forming bonds that would last a lifetime. These relationships were not just about sharing good times but also about standing by each other in times of need.

Looking back, these friendships were among the most valuable aspects of my high school experience. They enriched my life in countless ways, providing both companionship and inspiration. We celebrated each other's successes and supported each other through setbacks, creating a strong network of encouragement and positivity. These connections have deeply impacted my life, shaping my understanding of what it means to be a true friend and the value of a supportive community. I will always cherish the lessons and memories they brought me. The sense of belonging and the lifelong bonds we formed are treasures that continue to influence my life and remind me of the power of friendship and mutual support.

Beyond academics, Alliance Girls' offered a diverse range of extracurricular activities that added depth to my high school experience. I participated in the Red Cross Club, though its activity level was not as high as I had hoped. Despite not making a significant impact in the club, I valued the opportunity to contribute to community service initiatives. Additionally, I joined the French Club, primarily driven by my curiosity to immerse myself in music festivals. While navigating through French pronunciations was a challenge, I found joy in the poem practices and the camaraderie of struggling together. The highlight for me was the exhilarating moments of performing on stage during the Kenya Music Festivals. It was during these festivities that I had the chance to connect with new people, particularly boys from Nairobi School. Interacting with boys from other schools, especially Nairobi School, provided a refreshing perspective. Their grounded nature and intriguing conversations added a new dimension to my high school experience. However, beyond these interactions, I formed numerous friendships and gained insights into the cultures and talents of other schools. Witnessing the performances of bands and choirs from different institutions was both inspiring and enriching, fostering a sense of unity and appreciation for diversity.

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to explore sports, delving into activities like hockey, lawn tennis, and swimming which I had never tried before.

Like any journey, my time at Alliance Girls' came with its challenges. Adapting to the demanding schedule and living away from home were initial hurdles. However, these experiences taught me resilience and independence. The support from my family, teachers, and friends made these challenges conquerable. There was also a lot of pressure to always excel academically, with high expectations placed upon us. Despite my best efforts, I faced moments of disappointment, particularly when I didn't perform well in my physics paper and struggled to grasp certain concepts in chemistry. These were undoubtedly low points in my high school journey, but they also served as valuable learning experiences, teaching me the importance of perseverance and seeking help when needed.

Throughout my time at Alliance Girls', I experienced significant growth both academically and personally. The school's culture emphasized becoming individuals of substance, particularly women of substance. I learned how simple mannerisms can profoundly shape one's character. Sunday services were a highlight for me, especially when the hilarious Pastor Kioko was present. The school song emphasized the value of friendships and their precious nature and this was always a reminder to appreciate my friendships. The relationship between our school and our brother school was a delightful surprise. Joint movies, services, masses, and other activities strengthened the bond between the two schools. The random, silly mails that satisfied our teenage whims for love were particularly amusing. Sometimes, I think we were just idle or bored and needed to send a mail just to receive a reply that would give us something to think about and fantasize over in our teenage romantic escapades. The school's nurturing environment allowed me to explore my interests and develop my strengths. I became more confident, articulate, and driven, qualities that would serve me well beyond my school years. Reflecting on my journey at Alliance Girls' High School, I am filled with gratitude. The experiences, lessons, and friendships I gained are invaluable. This chapter of my life prepared me for future challenges and opportunities. My time at Alliance Girls' High School was more than just an academic pursuit; it was a transformative experience that shaped me into the person I am today.

I experienced major changes in my life during my high school years. On June 16th, 2018, my sister Shanice Ntinyari was born, coinciding with the day we were breaking for our holidays. I was overjoyed and excited to finally have a sister to share my space with, bringing immense happiness to our family. Shanice became our bundle of joy and still is. I learned how to hold, feed, bathe, sing to sleep, and care for a baby. Shanice grew up to be clever, joyful, and playful. I watched her develop from not being able to say a word to shouting my name and making commands. She has always been my favourite person, and my love for her grows every day. She is one of the reasons I remain strong during adversities and constantly push myself to be better. I aspire to be a source of hope and guidance for her, always there for her in times of confusion, lows, and highs. Shanice also brings endless entertainment into my life; on a dull day, I just need to convince her to sing me her hilarious Bongo flava remixes,

which always lighten my mood and often leave me in fits of laughter. I am forever grateful for her.

2020 was in my final year of high school, which meant facing the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams. These exams are pivotal, determining both my future career and the university I would attend. The pressure of national examinations in Kenya is immense, and I felt it acutely. I was uncertain about my career path, so when it came time to fill out the application forms, I decided to hedge my bets and drafted three different forms, each representing my top career choices: law, medicine, and a technology-related course. The idea of becoming a lawyer and helping people achieve justice appealed to me deeply. Law seemed like a noble profession where I could promote justice and fairness. Medicine was attractive because of its prestige and my desire to help people feel better and cared for. It's a competitive field, but the thought of becoming a doctor, a career that every parent seemed to dream of for their child, was very tempting. On the other hand, the tech field seemed to align perfectly with my interests. Although I had no formal background in technology, I was excited by the possibility and willing to take the plunge. Ultimately, I prioritized medicine in my initial course applications.

That year was also marked by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. In March, schools closed to comply with health regulations and curb the spread of the virus. This sudden break introduced uncertainty about when we would return to school and sit for our final exams. We endured the longest holiday ever, but our schools adapted by embracing virtual classes, which kept us engaged and connected to our studies. Despite the challenges, I have fond memories of fun and interactive study sessions with friends from home during this period. We supported each other, shared resources, and often found ways to make the virtual learning experience enjoyable. The collaboration we developed was instrumental in maintaining our morale and motivation.

We eventually returned to school and sat for our final exams in April 2021, marking the end of my high school journey. Parting ways with friends was painful, especially without the certainty of ever meeting again. The bonds we had formed over the years made it hard to say goodbye, and the pandemic's lingering uncertainty added to the emotional weight of our farewells. However, I was thrilled to close this chapter of my life and looked forward with excitement to what the future held. The pandemic had taught me resilience and adaptability, qualities that would serve me well in my future endeavors. I felt a mix of nostalgia for the past and eagerness for the opportunities and experiences that awaited me.

As I transitioned to the next phase of my life, I carried with me the lessons learned during that time. The pandemic had disrupted our lives in unprecedented ways, but it also brought out our resourcefulness and ability to adapt. These experiences had prepared me for the uncertainties of the future, instilling in me a sense of confidence and readiness to face whatever came my way.

At this point, like any other national exam, we had to endure the nerve-wracking wait for the marking and release of the results. The anxiety was almost unbearable; I was consumed with

worry about my scores and the career path they would determine, as well as which university I would be able to attend. When the results were finally announced, I was relieved to see that I had performed well. However, I quickly realized that my scores were not high enough to qualify for a medicine program at a public university. This forced me to reconsider and re-strategize my career options.

After much contemplation and advice from my mother, I was torn between pursuing nursing, a field that resonated with my desire to help others, and computer science, a path that intrigued me with its vast potential and alignment with my interests in technology. Ultimately, I decided to follow my passion for technology and applied for computer science programs at various universities. My efforts paid off when I was accepted into Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. This marked the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in my academic and professional journey, as I embraced the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead in the world of computer science.

When catching up with my friends about the newly formed jitters of careers, universities, and moving out of home, I realized that I had to start a new life in a completely new place, Nyeri, where Dedan Kimathi University was located. None of my friends were admitted to any nearby institutions, so while I was excited about joining campus, I also felt uncertain about meeting a new group of amazing friends. Despite my apprehensions, I found solace in knowing that everyone in my circle seemed happy and satisfied with their career choices. It gave me hope that we would all get a chance to pursue our dreams and that, someday, we might be reunited.

I reported to Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in October 2021. Having never been to Nyeri before, I was constantly warned about how cold it would be. Bracing for the worst, I packed plenty of warm clothes. To my surprise, when I arrived, Nyeri was quite the opposite—dry vegetation and scorching sun greeted me. I felt the need to correct those who had misled me, as I had mentally prepared for a much colder environment. Despite this, Nyeri turned out to be a serene and peaceful place. The university is nestled in nature and offers a stunning view of Mount Kenya, creating an excellent learning environment at first glance. I was accompanied by my brother, aunt, mother, and father, all of whom were excited for me and playfully commented on the upcountry surroundings. Using Google Maps for guidance, we amusingly ended up on Dedan Kimathi Street instead of the university, having no prior knowledge of its location. Eventually, we found our way, and I found the mix-up quite hilarious. Once I settled into my hostel, my relatives headed back home, and it dawned on me that I was once again alone in a new environment without any friends. However, my roommate arrived soon after, alleviating my solitude and giving me someone to talk to and ask questions about everything.

I was pleasantly surprised by the administration process at Dedan Kimathi University. Contrary to my expectations of long lines, as my friends had experienced at other universities, the process here was efficient and mostly online. We only needed to submit some documents to the school later in the week. The first week at university was primarily



about orientation and getting familiar with the campus. I found it challenging to make friends initially, and the bustling environment with so many new faces was a bit overwhelming. I also encountered the notorious "freshers' rush" when a random guy, pretending to be helpful and offering to show me around, likely had ulterior motives of wanting a fresher girlfriend. That encounter marked my first real experience with the "campus boys." In hindsight, I find it amusing and recognize it as a near-miss situation. It's a story I still laugh about today.

Before I knew it, classes had begun. My first class, Calculus 1, was scheduled for 7 am on a Monday morning. I was incredibly excited and eager to make a strong start. At that time, I was unaware of the concept of "bouncing" classes, where classes get cancelled or rescheduled without prior notice. That cold morning, I found myself alone in the auditorium, waiting for a class that never happened. It turned out that no communication had been made about the cancellation, which I later learned was quite normal in campus settings. Checking my course mates' group chat, I saw them making fun of anyone who showed up that early. Embarrassed, I decided to keep my experience to myself.

Thereafter, classes resumed, and while the concepts initially seemed hard to grasp, looking back, they were easier to understand than I had thought. Academically, life was good during that period. I finally began to interact with other students and gradually made new friends. We would walk to and from class, cracking jokes and sharing our experiences. Through these interactions, I learned new things and got exposed to different cultures. It was a time of growth and discovery, both academically and socially.

My first year at university flew by faster than I had anticipated. In what seemed like no time at all, I had completed my first year, experiencing a multitude of new things from diverse cuisines to cutting-edge fields in technology. The pressure to find my niche in the expansive world of technology and computer science was intense, and I quickly realized it was much broader than I had imagined. Amidst this, a friend provided me with invaluable encouragement and guidance. With their support, I began learning web development, diving into CSS, JavaScript, and HTML. I vividly remember the first time I ran my code and created a simple web page. Despite its simplicity and lack of sophistication, I felt an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and joy. That seemingly mundane web page marked the beginning of my exciting journey into the world of web development.

While at university, I explored various hobbies in search of a hidden talent. I joined a church dance crew, which kept me busy in the evenings. I struggled to master the dance steps as quickly as the other members, and I eventually realized that dance, which I had held in such high regard, might not be my talent after all. Despite this, I loved the energy and camaraderie during practice sessions and genuinely enjoyed dancing. I also tried salsa classes, but eventually gave it up due to the intense waist movements, which proved challenging for me. However, I still have a strong desire to learn contemporary dance and haven't completely given up on that dream. These experiences were fun and led to many

friendships. In addition, I joined the Rotaract Club of Dedan Kimathi University, where I found a community of like-minded individuals who enjoyed engaging conversations, community service projects, and having fun while serving. Some of my best experiences and moments of enlightenment happened through my involvement with Rotaract. Besides participating in clubs and communities at university, I have dedicated my free time to gaining a better understanding of technology and exploring its various fields. Additionally, I have focused on improving my skills in web development, continually learning and growing in this area.

My second and third years at university flew by, largely because we didn't have any long holidays. During this time, I learned a great deal, both in my coursework and in life. I encountered some fascinating lecturers and faced some challenging courses that I initially doubted I could survive. There were moments when I walked out of exam rooms with tears in my eyes, but I persevered. Those years were filled with both hard times and good times. Sometimes, I felt incredibly sad and hopeless; other times, I was full of life. As graduation approached, life seemed to move even faster, and the pressure of academic and career expectations intensified. This period required me to continuously discover and rediscover myself while striving to stay hopeful and encouraged.

I always looked forward to holidays because they meant reuniting with my family. During this time, we started living with Mark and Nkirote, friends who had become like family. Our house was always full and lively, never a dull moment. We cracked jokes, composed songs, bantered, and shared experiences. Mark even got me into Bongo music, a genre I had previously disliked. Those holiday days were a lot of fun, and I cherished the time spent with everyone. Reflecting on this now, I realize I often returned to school early, sometimes because I felt too relaxed at home or after clashing with my mother. Despite not knowing what the future holds, I am really grateful for those moments. Now, whenever I feel bored or homesick, listening to Bongo music brings back good memories and lifts my spirits thanks to Mark.

During this time, I also grew closer to my friends. We organized small hangouts that always ended in laughter and fun. We played games, cooked together, went on picnics, and occasionally enjoyed lunch dates. These moments were not only entertaining but also deeply meaningful. We shared our hardships and happy moments, and each hangout left me feeling a bit more healed and grateful, ready to face new challenges. This was a stark contrast to my first friend group on campus, where hangouts often felt like banter battles that chipped away at my self-esteem. Fortunately, I eventually met some truly amazing people who remain valuable to me to this day. Having such friends made life more bearable and enriched my university experience significantly.

In those moments, I often found myself reflecting on my life, sometimes shedding tears out of worry about what the future held and when things would fall into place. Being active on various career platforms, I saw peers seemingly achieving so much, which only amplified my anxiety. Despite my efforts and progress, I felt I wasn't measuring up to their

accomplishments. The pressure was immense. I wondered if I had been too hopeful at the beginning of my university journey. Each day brought a new challenge of staying motivated and pushing forward, even when doubts crept in. Yet, the bonds I had formed with my friends and the shared experiences gave me strength. Their presence made the uncertainties of the future more bearable. Knowing that we were all facing similar challenges and emotions helped me realize that I wasn't alone in my fears and doubts. The fear of the unknown was ever-present, but so was the determination to make the most of my remaining time at university. I focused on improving my skills in web development and exploring various fields in technology, hoping to carve out a path for myself.

Through it all, I remained hopeful, even when it was difficult. The friendships I had cultivated and the experiences we shared became my anchor, reminding me that while the future was uncertain, I had already come a long way. These relationships and memories would carry me forward, no matter where life took me next.

I am currently in my final year of university, and the famous fourth-year projects are catching up to me. However, it's not as bad as it sounds. We have fewer units to complete, and the content feels somewhat simpler. Despite this, the pressure remains, and the frequent reminders that the world beyond university is not easy are among my biggest fears. In this critical year, I am focused on expanding my skills, hoping that my efforts will land me a tech role or internship. Balancing project work with the pursuit of new knowledge and practical experience is challenging but essential. I am keenly aware of the importance of this period in shaping my future career. While the fear of the unknown is ever-present, I am motivated by the prospect of applying what I've learned in a real-world setting. The idea of stepping into the professional world excites me, even though it comes with its own set of challenges. The support and encouragement from my peers and mentors help me stay focused and driven.

As I work on my projects, I try to make the most of the resources available to me, seeking guidance and feedback to refine my work. The collaborative environment at university has been instrumental in my growth, and I hope to carry this spirit of teamwork and continuous learning into my future career. Overall, this final year is a blend of anticipation, preparation, and reflection. While I am aware of the difficulties that lie ahead, I am also confident in my ability to navigate them with the skills and resilience I have developed over the years. The journey is just beginning, and I am determined to make the most of it.

Wrapping up the 8-4-4 education system feels like the end of an era, something I knew would eventually happen but not this quickly. As I stand at this crossroads, I'm filled with a mix of nostalgia and anticipation for what lies ahead. The thought of pursuing a master's degree is exciting, and I'm equally hopeful about securing a tech role in a reputable company as a solid starting point for my career. My ambitions extend beyond academic and professional achievements. I have a profound desire to travel extensively, exploring the diverse landscapes and cultures the world has to offer. From majestic mountains and serene beaches to bustling cities and quaint towns, I dream of experiencing it all. The idea of standing atop a mountain peak, feeling the sea breeze on a beach, or immersing myself in

the vibrant life of a new city fuels my wanderlust. I am determined to make these dreams a reality one day.

However, my aspirations are not solely about my personal journey. The happiness and well-being of my siblings are paramount in my life. I consider it a core purpose to support them in every way possible, helping them achieve their dreams and goals. Whether it's through emotional support, financial assistance, or simply being there for them during challenging times, I am committed to their success and happiness. Their joy and accomplishments bring me immense satisfaction, and I strive to be a pillar of strength and encouragement for them.

In addition to my family, I am passionate about making a positive impact on my community and the world at large. I believe in the power of giving back and aim to contribute to various social causes that resonate with me. Whether it's through volunteering, supporting educational initiatives, or advocating for environmental sustainability, I want to play a role in creating a better future for everyone. As I reflect on the journey so far and look forward to the next chapter, I am filled with gratitude for the experiences that have shaped me and the opportunities that await. The transition from the 8-4-4 system to new possibilities is a significant milestone, and I am ready to embrace it with enthusiasm and determination. The path ahead may be uncertain, but I am confident in my ability to navigate it. With a clear vision of my goals, a strong support system, and an unwavering commitment to growth and learning, I am poised to make the most of the opportunities that come my way. I am excited to see where this journey leads, knowing that every step taken brings me closer to realizing my dreams and making a meaningful impact on the world.

My journey so far has encompassed the full spectrum of life's experiences. I've had moments of overwhelming happiness and periods of deep sadness, times of feeling highly encouraged and instances of profound discouragement. Through it all, I've learned to navigate life's ups and downs by allowing myself to fully experience each emotion and by taking one day at a time, always keeping my future aspirations in mind. I am still learning to decentre the negative aspects of my life and accept the things I cannot change. This ongoing process of acceptance and adaptation has taught me the importance of resilience and the power of a positive mindset. My goal is to live each day with purpose and to find joy in the little things. I hope to achieve my dreams and maintain a sense of encouragement and control over my life. This journey of personal growth and self-discovery has shown me that while challenges are inevitable, they also offer opportunities for learning and development. By focusing on what I can control and embracing each experience as it comes, I aim to create a fulfilling and purposeful life.

