EMBRACING HOPE, CONFRONTING FEAR

I turn a year older today. No, this is not the day I drop my top lessons learned over the course of my life. Rather, this is an article about hope and fear, the two conjoined twins. One of the greatest personal battles I had to fight was the desire for certainty - for things to work MY way. If one says they would do something, my default position was to expect them to carry through with the thing. But ours is a complex world with thousands of variables that are often out of our control. Recognizing this fact, I made peace with the discomfort of not knowing my tomorrow with a high degree of certainty. Instead, what I get to do is hope - hope that my actions, desires, and decisions will lead to the best outcomes.

To talk about hope necessitates acknowledging its twin - fear. I believe Erwin Schrödinger was also a great philosopher through his cat thought experiment which encapsulates life's paradoxes: to bring forth life is to know the pain of them losing you, or you them; to love is to know heartbreak. We face two sides of the same coin, at the same time. History is replete with phrases that echo this paradox: "Parting is such sweet sorrow;" "Life is suffering", and "yin and yang." To be alive we must acknowledge our mortality, and to hope for a better tomorrow is to recognize the fear that those desires and dreams may not come to pass, and yet to still move forward relentlessly.

Allan during KamiLimu's Cohort 7 graduation, 2023

It is hope that has driven me through the years, and which I further hope will carry me through the next as I move away from what has been a core part of my life for the past six years. In late 2017, I applied for the 3rd Cohort of KamiLimu. Fresh in JKUAT's Computer Science program while out of engineering school, I was deeply unsure of myself and whether I was worthy of a fresh start. If impostor syndrome had a home, it was in my head. As a counterbalance, I sought a program that would not only expose me to what the tech field had to offer but also to mentors who would guide and teach and help me to regain my confidence and uncover strengths I either had buried or did not know existed. KamiLimu would evict the impostor syndrome, still the voices in my head, and give me the opportunity to contribute my skills by mentoring others. I graduated as a mentee in 2018 and rejoined the program in 2019 as a peer mentor to four mentees: Lilian Kimando, Monica Wangari, Brian Kimani, and Meshack Kipkorir.

KamiLimu's founding committee at Cohort 6 graduation, 2022

In 2020, the Program Lead, Dr. Chao, appointed me to KamiLimu's first steering committee comprising 11 members. This group would make fundamental strides in positioning KamiLimu as Kenya's premier mentorship program for students pursuing tech-aligned courses at the tertiary level. For instance, we have helped broaden the reach of the program to 55 institutions across the country and raised over KES 700,000 from corporate sponsors.

I am most proud of my personal contributions to KamiLimu where I was in charge of program development and content curation. Over the course of four years, I supported the peer and professional mentorship models, assisted in making grant applications, produced written content on the program's impact, and co-authored a peer reviewed research paper - Nurturing Employability using Structured Mentorship for Tech Students in Kenya. Together with Mwaniki Nyaga, we authored 26 blog posts and human stories on KamiLimu's Medium and Instagram accounts. One of my key highlights was in 2020 when I helped Dr. Chao to make an application that led to KamiLimu's shortlisting as the 2020 Africa Gold Winner by the Reimagine Education Awards & Conference.

But my time with KamiLimu was not without its challenges. I joined the committee while still a student, and I had to balance a tight schedule between my studies, work, and KamiLimu. Later, when life became even more demanding after graduating from JKUAT, I had periods where I questioned whether I should continue contributing to KamiLimu. On KamiLimu's end, running a program that does not levy fees on its mentees translates to always operating on a shoestring budget. The lack of sufficient monetary resources means that we often had to allocate finances to the most pressing and immediate needs, while relegating or abandoning others. This strict balancing of resources would come at a cost. For instance, we lost out on a grant award in 2022 because one of the key requirements, which we did not meet, was we should have a physical address. However, if there's one thing KamiLimu has in abundance is the goodwill of its community. To date, the program has raised over KES 2 million from its alumni and worked with 112 professional mentors who volunteer to provide mentorship and support to mentees.

"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." My tenure as a KamiLimu committee member came to an end in December 2023. While the decision to leave the program was particularly agonizing, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to have contributed to a serious mission with serious people. I leave KamiLimu hopeful but unsure about my next steps. My priorities this year are to drive Falu's growth as its marketing and communications consultant. At the same time, I launched two initiatives late last year that need my attention: Karuna Memorial, where we seek to help create unique and personalized farewell products, and Positive Sum Africa, where we hope to build a hub for Africa's entrepreneurs doing their life's work. On KamiLimu's end, it is understandably going to be a challenging period with the transition to a leaner and reorganized committee. However, I have unwavering faith in Dr. Chao's management and leadership and I know the program will grow to greater heights than I leave it.
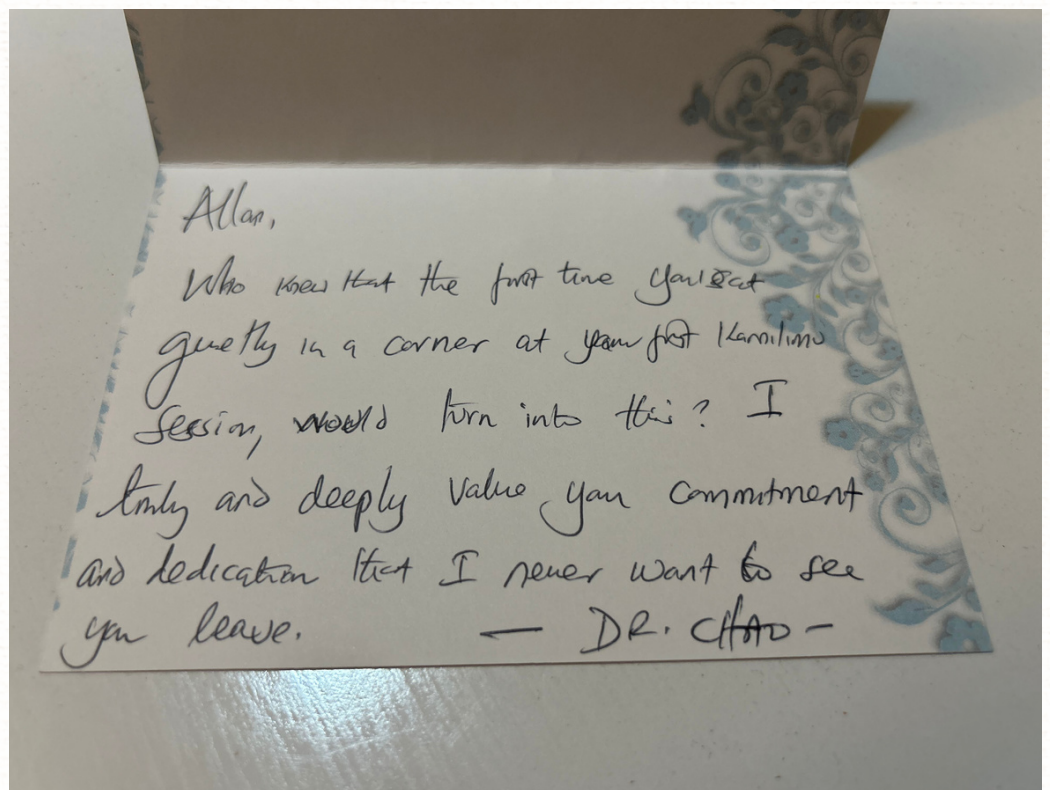
As Denzel Washington said during the 48th NAACP Image Awards: "See you at work!"

Oh, and happy birthday to me 🎉

Positive
+ Africa