ECHOES OF THE ESCARPMENT:
An Autobiography

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Bachelor of Science in Information Technology

Dedan Kimathi University of Technology

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CHAPTER 1: THE THIN AIR OF BEGINNINGS (2003–2005)

1.1 The Geography of Birth

The geography of one's birth often dictates the geometry of their worldview. I was born into altitude. Iten, perched on the edge of the Elgeyo Escarpment, exists at 2,400 meters above sea level. The air here is not merely a medium for breathing; it is a resource, thin and demanding, forcing the lungs to expand and the blood to thicken. I entered this scenic environment on April 22, 2003, at a time when the region was cementing its reputation as the global capital of distance running.

However, for a newborn, global reputations mean nothing. My universe was circumscribed by the fence line of a modest homestead that overlooked the Great Rift Valley. To the east, the land dropped away into the vast, hazy floor of the valley; to the west, the road wound towards Eldoret. This juxtaposition between the grounding reality of the farm and the dizzying potential of the cliff edge would become the primary tension of my life.

My arrival into the Kemboi household was a quiet affair. My parents, Vincent and Monicah Kemboi, were young, yet they possessed a gravity that seemed to predate their years. They were anchored by two things: the red soil of our farm and the rigid structure of their faith. In our household, noise was not a sign of life; productivity was.

1.2 The Silent Authority

My father, Vincent Kemboi, was a study in stillness. In a region where men often asserted dominance through volume, he commanded the room through silence. I have

distinct early memories of him sitting by the wooden table in our main room, repairing a tool or reading a newspaper. He did not need to shout to enforce discipline. A shifted glance or a prolonged pause was usually enough to bring order to the chaos created by a growing family.

This silence was not empty; it was calculating. He was a man who measured his words very carefully. From him, I learned that authority does not require performance. It requires presence.

My mother, Monicah Kemboi, provided the counter-rhythm. If my father was the stillness, she was the kinetic energy. She was the economic engine of the house, a woman capable of incredible financial elasticity. I watched her negotiate prices at the market, stretch a single packet of unga to feed a crowd, and manage the intricate logistics of a rural household. She did not deal in complaints. She dealt in solutions. Her philosophy was practical: if something was broken, you fixed it; if it was dirty, you cleaned it; if it was empty, you filled it.

1.3 The Soundtrack of Iten

I was not the first child to be born in the bloodline. My sister, Sonia Cheruto, had already established her place in the hierarchy. By the time I was a toddler, she was already acting as a deputy parent, a role she assumed with a seriousness that bordered on professional. The house would later fill with the boisterous energy of my younger brother, Brian Kiptoo, and the eventual baby of the family, Stacy Jepkemoi, but my earliest memories are fragmented, sensory snapshots of a quieter time.

I remember the smell of woodsmoke. In Iten, the mornings are cold a piercing chill that seeps into the bones. The scent of cypress wood burning in the kitchen stove was the signal that the day had begun. I remember the tactile scratchiness of heavy wool sweaters, essential armor against the morning mist.But most vividly, I remember the sound.

Before I understood what the Olympics were, and before I knew that my hometown was famous, I knew the sound of the runners. It was a rhythmic, collective thumping on the dirt roads outside our gate. It happened every morning at dawn. To a child’s ear, it sounded like a mini-earthquacke moving across the land.

I would stand by the gate, peering through the slats, watching the packs of men and women glide past. They were lean, focused, and moved with a fluidity that made the act of running look effortless. I did not know then that I was watching world record holders, Boston Marathon winners, and Olympic gold medalists. To me, they were simply towns folks doing morning exercises.

1.4 Normalizing the Extraordinary

In most parts of the world, an Olympic athlete is a celebrity, a figure seen only on television screens. In Iten, they were the people buying sugar at the local kiosk. Growing up in this environment rewired my understanding of human potential. I never grew up thinking that greatness was a distant, abstract concept reserved for "other people." Greatness was sweating on the road next to my house. It was tangible. It was achievable through repetition and pain.

This subconscious education served a different purpose. It taught me that elite performance is not an accident. It is the result of a mundane, daily grind. The runners didn't run only when they felt like it, they ran because it was 6:00 AM. This distinction between motivation and discipline was the first academic lesson I absorbed, long before I ever stepped foot in a classroom at Hill School.

CHAPTER 2: THE LONG COMMUTE & A SUDDEN VACANCY (2006–2017)

2.1 The Geometry of the 8-4-4 Grind

In 2006, the intimate world of Iten gave way to the structured, bustling demands of Eldoret. My primary education began at Hill School, a prestigious institution in the "big town." This required a radical restructuring of our morning routine.

For the first four years of my life at Hill School, my father, Vincent, was the anchor of this commute. He worked in Eldoret, and his schedule meant that my school journey became a shared ritual. I woke up at **5:30 AM**, the darkness still thick and the air biting cold. By **6:30 AM**, I was seated on the school bus, or sometimes, depending on my father’s work logistics, in a matatu.

The ride was a blur of hazy morning light, winding down the escarpment and into the urban sprawl. The bus was filled with the stiff, uniformed bodies of children half-asleep, their ambition already measured out in the weight of their schoolbags. This commute was my first lesson in discipline: showing up, ready to perform, regardless of how tired or cold you were. It was a rigorous introduction to the 8-4-4 system a curriculum designed not just to educate, but to harden.

Hill School itself was a sprawling campus, defined by colonial-era stone buildings with red corrugated roofs, standing in stark contrast to the small, wooden structures of Iten. Wearing that uniform carried a specific, visible weight it signaled proximity to opportunity and a certain level of expectation. I learned to read, solve equations, and, perhaps more critically, to navigate the unwritten rules of social hierarchy within the playground.

2.2 A Profile in Paradoxes

My academic identity quickly crystallized around the core sciences. I was bright, eager to please my parents, and initially, compliant.

However, I harbored significant academic vulnerabilities that chipped away at my confidence. My **handwriting** was poor a scrawl that was often illegible, a source of constant frustration for my teachers. My English teacher, Ms. Jane, often commented, with a sigh, that my ideas were sharp but my penmanship betrayed them. She saw a disconnect between the quickness of my mind and the sluggishness of my hand.

This struggle lasted until Class 7, when a new mathematics teacher, Mr. Kiprop, arrived. He was not just a teacher; he was a problem solver who taught us that math wasn't about numbers; it was about systems. His enthusiasm was contagious, and his methods were clear. He transformed my latent ability into a genuine passion, reinforcing my focus on the sciences and confirming that my academic strength lay in analytical fields. This clarity allowed me, eventually, to drop the subjects that dragged my overall performance, affirming the focus on the science of Information Technology later in my academic life.

2.3 The Pivot: Boarding and the KCPE Pressure

The shift to boarding school in **Class 4** was my first taste of true independence. The daily commute ended, but the rigor intensified. Boarding life was a lesson in self-reliance, laundry skills, and communal living. It stripped away the last remnants of childhood dependence and prepared me for the solitary pressure cooker of the final primary years.

By 2017, I was in **Class 8**, standing on the threshold of the **Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE)** the determinant of my entire future trajectory. The pressure was immense. Every lesson was weighted, every mock exam was a test of

willpower. I was focused, pulling high grades in the sciences, managing respectable scores in English, and compensating for my earlier weaknesses. The trajectory was perfect.

2.4 The Vacuum: A Sudden Vacancy (2017)

Life, however, rarely honors perfect trajectories. It was the latter half of 2017, the most critical period of my academic life, when the foundations of our home suddenly gave way.

My father, Vincent, who had been the quiet authority, the anchor of our commute, and the ultimate reason for our academic striving, passed away on a road accident on his way home to iten after he had come to visit me in school.

The world did not just stop; it became hollow. The quiet presence that had defined our discipline was gone, replaced by a deafening, financial, and emotional vacuum. For my mother, the immense task of sustaining the family emotionally and economically fell solely to her. For me, the loss was paralyzing.

I remember coming home from the funeral and seeing his tools the *jembe* he favored, the hammer he had used all resting where he left them. I felt a tremendous, crushing weight. The exam, the crucial gatekeeper to my future, was looming. How could I focus on the exams and revison when the very bedrock of my motivation had been shattered?

2.5 Prevailing Through the Silence

The pressure became less about grades and more about duty. My father’s death did not grant me the luxury of grief; it demanded immediate maturity. I understood, with sudden, painful clarity, that my success was no longer just a personal achievement; it was the financial security and the emotional vindication for my mother and siblings.

I returned to school with a singular focus. The grief was channeled not into sadness, but into frantic, dedicated study. I treated the KCPE preparation as a debt that had to be paid a final, silent tribute to the man who had always measured his words but whose expectations were always understood.

When the results were finally released, they confirmed my position. The performance was not flawless my overall score still showed the strain but my aggregate score was high enough to secure the most coveted admission in the region: a spot at the legendary St. Patrick's High School, Iten.

I had entered the year as Vincent's son; I exited it as the family's first line of defense. The adversity had not broken my academic performance; it had forged my resolve. I left primary school not just with a good grade, but with the painful, non-negotiable understanding of responsibility.

CHAPTER 3: IN THE SHADOW OF SAINTS & THE LOST YEAR (2018–2022)

3.1 The Monastery of the Escarpment

St. Patrick’s High School, Iten known simply as "Saints"is more than a school; it is an institution carved into the psyche of the region. Joining Saints in 2018 felt less like starting high school and more like being inducted into a rigorous, academic brotherhood. If Hill School had been a training ground, Saints was the proving ground.

The physical environment of the school mirrored the harsh discipline required to survive it. The campus is known for its biting cold. At 2,400 meters, the temperatures in the early morning dip low enough to numb fingers and slow thoughts. The architecture reflected the school’s long history: ten "Old Dorms"weather-beaten stone structures that had housed generations of champions and scholars stood as monuments to the past. In stark contrast, two "New Dorms" were under construction, eventually completed during my Form Three year, symbolizing the modernization we were all striving toward.

But regardless of which dorm you slept in, the cold was the great equalizer. It seeped through the walls and into the thin mattresses, a constant reminder that comfort was not the objective here. Excellence was.

3.2 The Rhythm of Discipline

The daily routine at Saints was a masterclass in time management, designed to strip away lethargy. The bell did not request our attention; it demanded it.

The day began at **4:30 AM**. Waking up at that hour, while the rest of the Rift Valley was still deep in slumber, required a specific kind of willpower. We washed in the

freezing dark and moved immediately to **Morning Preps**, which ran from **5:00 AM to 6:00 AM**. This hour was sacred. It was a time of absolute silence, where the only sound was the scratching of pens on paper and the turning of pages.

At **6:00 AM**, we broke for tea a quick, utilitarian intake of warmth before returning to preps until **8:00 AM**. By the time regular classes began, we had already completed three hours of self-directed study.

The instructional day ran from **8:00 AM to 4:00 PM**, a relentless marathon of syllabus coverage. After a break for games and hygiene, **supper was served at 6:00 PM**, followed immediately by evening preps that lasted until **10:00 PM**.

For four years, this was the rhythm of my life. It was a grueling cycle of "wake, study, eat, study, sleep." But it was within this rigid structure that my mind began to sharpen, and my academic identity began to solidify.

3.3 The Divergence: Logic vs. Memory

High school is the period where a student’s intellect forces them to choose a side. For me, this choice was dictated by a distinct polarization in my abilities.

My academic Achilles' heel remained **History and Geography**. I simply could not connect with the pedagogy of these subjects. They demanded the rote memorization of dates, colonial boundaries, and rainfall patterns information that felt static and dead. These subjects felt abstract to me, detached from the tangible reality of the farm and the functional logic of the world I observed. I was a student of the how and the why, not the when and the where.

Conversely, I found my home in the Sciences. I was naturally gifted in **Mathematics** and the rudiments of **Physics**. The logic of equations provided a comfort that the messy, subjective nature of humanities did not. In Physics, if you applied the correct

force to the correct mass, the result was predictable, calculable, and true. In Mathematics, there was always a solution if you worked hard enough to find it.

This preference was not just about grades; it was about a way of thinking. I dropped the humanities as soon as the curriculum allowed, focusing entirely on the sciences and Computer Studies. This was the first strategic step toward my future at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT), though I did not know it at the time.

3.4 The Great Stagnation (2020)

I was in Form Three the critical year where the bulk of the syllabus is covered when the world tilted.

In March 2020, the announcements began to filter in. A virus. A pandemic. A lock down. Initially, there was confusion. We thought it might be a two-week break, a welcome respite from the 4:30 AM mornings. We were wrong. We were sent home, and the gates of Saints closed behind us. What followed was not a break, but a **systemic disruption**. The country shut down. The educational calendar, usually as reliable as the sunrise, was suspended indefinitely.

For a student conditioned to the high-velocity environment of Saints, the sudden stillness of home was jarring. The psychological blow was significant. We lost the equivalent of one full year of studies. The momentum we had built in Form One and Form Two evaporated.

3.5 The Steward of the Farm

During the long months of the pandemic, with schools closed and movement restricted, my identity shifted. I ceased to be a student and returned to the role of a son and a farmhand. Without the structure of the school bell, I had to find a new routine. I dedicated myself to assisting my mother on the family homestead. The

absence of my father was felt keenly during this time the manual labor he would have managed now fell to us.

I spent my days tending to the livestock, ensuring the cows were fed and milked, and managing the crops. It was humble, repetitive work. There was no "glamorous" innovation here, just the steady maintenance of life. However, this period was crucial for my grounding. It taught me patience. Unlike a math problem, which can be solved in minutes, a crop cannot be rushed. You plant, you water, and you wait.

This connection to the land kept me sane while the world outside was in chaos. It reminded me that even when institutions close and economies stall, life in its most biological sense persists.

3.6 The Masked Return and the Crash Program

When schools finally reopened, the world had changed. We returned to Saints not to the freedom of brotherhood, but to a sterilized, fearful environment. We wore full masks in class, breathing in our own exhaust during double lessons. Social distancing protocols turned the crowded, energetic dorms into spaces of suspicion. The psychological toll was heavy. We were the "COVID Class," the group that had to make up for lost time.

The administration instituted a "Crash Program." We were forced to compress the lost year of content into shortened terms. The pressure was suffocating. Sleep became even more of a luxury than before. Perhaps the hardest part was the isolation. To prevent the spread of the virus, the school banned all outside visitors. Prayer Days traditionally the one day where parents would come, bring food, and offer encouragement were held without them.

I remember sitting in the hall for the dedication service, looking around at the masked faces of my peers. I thought of my mother at home. I knew she was praying for me,

but her absence in the physical space was a heavy burden. I had to summon the discipline to face the KCSE alone.

There were no pep talks from parents, no shared meals on the grass. There was only the cold morning air of Iten, the pile of books, and the terrifying realization that the future depended entirely on what I could retrieve from my mind under pressure.

CHAPTER 4: THE ASCENT TO NYERI & THE DIGITAL FRONTIER (2023–PRESENT)

4.1 The Unpredictable Highlands: A Cultural and Meteorological Shock

The letter of admission to Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT) was my ticket out of the familiar, crisp predictability of the Rift Valley and into the heart of the Central Highlands. This journey represented not just academic progress, but a significant cultural and climatic relocation. In Iten, the air is thin, dry, and consistently cold an environment that breeds physical endurance. Nyeri, however, demands constant vigilance. The campus is nestled in a corridor caught between the windward and leeward sides of Mount Kenya, meaning the weather is violently unpredictable, capable of swinging from punishing, super-dry heat to torrential, bone-chilling rain, often within a single, confusing afternoon.

I learned this meteorological instability the hard way during my first month. I vividly remember waking up to a brilliant, cloudless sky, trusting the fierce morning sun. I left my raincoat and heavy sweaters in the hostel, confident in the dry promise of the day. By 2:00 PM, while I was midway across the immense university grounds, the mountain had suddenly changed its mind. The sky turned a dense, bruised purple, and the heavens opened with a fury that transformed the pathways into fast-moving rivers. I was caught without shelter, and within minutes, I was soaked to the bone, my shoes ruined, and my books damp. The physical shock was immense, but the meteorological *twist* came later. By 5:00 PM, just as the evening preps were beginning, the clouds had vanished. The sun burst through, painting the newly washed mountainside gold, drying the stones and tarmac so completely that it was as if the brutal downpour had never occurred. Nyeri taught me, instantly, that the only

constant is change, and that devastation is often quickly followed by unexpected clarity.

This environmental lesson paralleled the cultural shift. I moved from the running-focused Kalenjin community of Iten to the agrarian and political heritage surrounding Mount Kenya. The language changed, the food changed, and the social rhythms shifted. This isolation forced me out of my comfort zone, compelling me to quickly observe, listen, and integrate, acknowledging that my success would depend on my ability to adapt to external systems.

4.2 The University as a Sanctuary of Purpose

My preconceived notion of university life, full of city chaos and concrete, was shattered the moment I arrived at DeKUT. The campus is not in town; it is a carefully curated sanctuary tucked away on the outskirts, bordering the thick Aberdare Forest. The atmosphere is quiet, heavy with oxygen and the scent of damp earth, engineered for deep, uninterrupted thought.

Walking through the central quad, I was struck by the dual identity of the institution. The bronze Freedom Fighter statutes stood tall and commanding, physical reminders of the sacrifice that secured our nation's intellectual freedom. Contrastingly, the sleek, glass-walled **Technology Hubs** hummed with the quiet energy of innovation, symbolizing the future we were meant to build. Standing between the forest and the fiber-optic cables, I realized my academic pursuit was an extension of that national purpose: to apply knowledge to solve the next generation of problems.

4.3 The Crushing Weight of Complacency

Despite this surge of motivation, my transition was anything but seamless. I entered university carrying the dangerous confidence of a top student from a national school,

assuming that "being bright" was sufficient armor. The absence of the strict 4:30 AM bell and the rigorous schedule of St. Patrick’s lulled me into a period of deep complacency.

The consequence arrived in the form of **Statistics II**. I attended the lectures, but I dismissed the unit as a simple extension of high school math, believing I could coast on natural ability. I prioritized socializing and sleep over the crucial post-lecture problem-solving. When the Continuous Assessment Test (CAT) results were posted, I found my index number next to a devastating **D**. The letter felt like a betrayal. In Iten, such a grade was a catastrophe. Here, it was a systemic failure, a direct result of a breakdown in my personal work system.

The shame was the fuel I needed. I instituted a personal "crash program," modeling my response on the urgency my mother showed when she picked up her hoe after the blight. I stopped viewing my peers as rivals and instead sought their strengths, joining a serious, peer-led **study group** composed of the most analytically disciplined students. I did not rely on the assigned homework; I subjected myself to the self-punishment of solving every single end-of-chapter problem in the Statistics textbook. I treated the concept of *Probability Distributions* not as theory, but as a rigid, uncompromising system that had to be mastered through brute-force repetition. When I retook the CAT, the difference was clear, and I passed decisively. This incident was my most valuable lesson at DeKUT: success is not about potential, but about the robust, self-managed *systems* you build to sustain knowledge.

4.4 Forging a Professional Portfolio

With my discipline restored, I threw myself into the practical application of my degree, understanding that theory is worthless without deployment. My portfolio grew not in a straight, simple line, but through a series of messy, frustrating, and eventually triumphant struggles.

I began by joining an intensive coding bootcamp. This experience forced me to rapidly assimilate languages like **Python** and **Java** under pressure. My early projects were simple but functional; one notable effort was a basic **Expense Tracker** application, built using the **Flask** framework, designed to manage small-scale family finances a direct connection to the hard-won resourcefulness of my mother.

The learning curve was a steep lesson in humility. I vividly recall one night staring at my monitor for six hours, unable to find a missing semicolon in a **Java** function, a small, invisible error that held the entire program captive. This relentless search for tiny, invisible errors taught me the exhaustive detail required in engineering.

The greatest technical crisis came during a critical group project deadline. My laptop screen suddenly flickered, then died, a complete motherboard failure. I lost two days of work, and panic was a real, physical sensation. This hardware crash was the digital equivalent of the tomato blight: a systemic failure that threatened the entire investment. But the memory of my mother's tenacity took over. I borrowed a peer's machine, used version control, and spent 36 consecutive hours rebuilding the code for the **Group Project Management System** from memory and relentless debugging. It reinforced that the ability to recover from unexpected failure is the most critical technical skill.

My most significant professional contribution came during my **Industrial Attachment**, where I was tasked with developing a fully functional **Internship Application Portal**. This was a complex, real-world task requiring me to build the **MySQL** database backend, develop application validation logic using **PHP**, and design a clean, intuitive user interface with **Bootstrap**. Seeing my code transition from a concept to a tool used daily by the firm was the definitive, triumphant moment of my shift from student to professional.

4.5 The Synthesis of Resilience and Innovation

The Capstone process itself, which includes this autobiography, my professional CV, and reflective essays on societal problems, serves as the final, most comprehensive project. It demands that I synthesize my entire life experience into a coherent professional thesis.

I now understand that my greatest assets are not merely the programming languages I have mastered, but the resilience forged in the face of adversity. The discipline to adhere to systems was learned from the 4:30 AM routines of Saints. The resourcefulness to pivot and rebuild was learned from the downpours of Nyeri and the crash of my laptop.

CHAPTER 5:PROLOGUE

My name is Willin Broad Kiplimo. I am a young professional who understands that code, like life, is an exercise in managing complex systems that are prone to unpredictable errors. The thin air of Iten built my lungs for the long race. The failures along the way built my character for the unpredictable frontier of technology. The code is compiled. The test cases have passed. I am ready to deploy.